THE

# LETTERS

OF

# GEORGICUS,

UPON

## THE INIQUITY OF TYTHES,

INTENDED FOR

## THE BENEFIT OF

## THE ENGLISH FARMER,

WITH ADDITIONS.

"By Heav'ns, I would rather coin my Heart
"And drop my Blood for Drachmas, than I'd wring
"From the baſe Hands of Peaſants their vile Traſh,
"By any Indirection."

SHAKESPEAR, JUL. CÆS.

LONDON:

Printed for J. Wilkie, No. 72, St. Paul's Church-yard; J. Almon, Piccadilly; and F. Blythe, Finch-lane, Cornhill.

MDCCLXXIII.

[Price One Shilling and Sixpence.]

# CONTENTS.


## LETTER I.

AN Addreſs to the Landholders, on the expediency of petitioning Parliament for redreſs againſt the payment of tythes in kind.

## LETTER II.

An enquiry into the common opinion that the landlord pays the tythe by allowing for it in the rent. A caution againſt admitting the land-tax into leaſes. A ſketch of a petition.

## LETTER III.

A tranſlation from Voltaire, on the poſſeſſions of the clergy.

## LETTER IV.

An enquiry into the origin of tythes, and their progreſs, up to their eſtabliſhment by legacies and grants.

LETTER V.

The progreſs of tythes, up to their eſtabliſhment among the laws of the land.

LETTER VI.

The injuſtice of tythes conſidered as a law.

LETTER VII.

On tythes, conſidered as an eccleſiaſtical property.

LETTER VIII.

On tythes conſidered as a tax.

LETTER IX.

An anſwer to ſuch of *Dean Swift's* arguments, againſt a bill for ſettling the tythes of flax by a modus, as far as they relate to tythes in general.

LETTER X.

An addreſs to the ſocieties of agriculture.

LET-

LETTER XI.

The advantages of an abolition of tythes to the clergy considered.

CONCLUSION.

A short review of the whole.

# PREFACE.

THE following letters have already appeared in the London Evening Poſt. The ſubject is of very extenſive concern; it was therefore thought neceſſary to circulate them by the means of a popular paper. As the continuance of them to their preſent number was not foreſeen, the unconnected appearance of a few is ſufficiently accounted for; but ſince they are ſo encreaſed, as to form an entire treatiſe upon tythes, the ſame reaſons of utility, which before prevailed in diſperſing them, have now collected them together.

Their object, the *abolition* of tythes, is no Utopian ſcheme: its practicability was evinced by a great part of Europe, at the time when ſo many kingdoms and ſtates renounced the errors and authority of the Romiſh church. It would therefore be a ſatire upon the excellency of the Engliſh conſtitution, which is founded on liberty and juſtice, to treat that as a viſionary hope, which is bent upon extending theſe bleſſings, by the repeal of a law ſo totally repugnant to both.

The

The truths that are here inſiſted on, when fully explained, ſeem ſo very clear, that many people may be induced to think they are more enlarged upon than was neceſſary; but let it be conſidered, that if they had been univerſally and ſufficiently underſtood, the abolition of the tythe laws would not have remained an object for the patriotiſm of the preſent age.

An

# LETTER I.

## *An* ADDRESS *to the* LANDHOLDERS *of* ENGLAND *on the* EXPEDIENCY *of* PETITIONING PARLIAMENT *for* REDRESS *againſt the* PAYMENT *of* TYTHES IN KIND.

*Gentlemen,*

IN an age when the ſpirit of Liberty operates more or leſs through the various ranks of the community, and almoſt every day produces ſome new attempt to ſhake off the chains that power has impoſed, and long uſage has rivetted; it is aſtoniſhing that you alone ſhould be ſo patient under the moſt pernicious, the moſt extenſive oppreſſion that can poſſibly diſgrace a free people. It is high time to give it ſome attention, and to try every legal method to obtain redreſs, and tear away the only remaining badge of the ſlavery and ſuperſtition of our forefathers, when they ſuffered the Popes of Rome to give law in theſe kingdoms.

I appeal to you all, nay to every Engliſhman who feels himſelf as ſuch, whether THE PAYMENT OF TYTHES IN KIND, by the arbitrary mode of collecting them, and the exorbitant pro-

portion they bear to the rent of the land, is not an oppreſſion of the ſevereſt claſs. Far be it from me even to wiſh to diminiſh the dues and revenues of the Clergy; in many caſes I think they ought to be encreaſed; but the Farmer, the moſt uſeful ſubject in the kingdom, muſt not groan under a taxation, marked with the greateſt injuſtice, ſolely for the emolument of the Church: My wiſhes are, to ſee the wiſdom of Parliament employed in reconciling their ſeveral intereſts to the mutual advantage of religion, liberty, and agriculture.

It is poſſible that I may be reproached with impiety and infidelity, for attempting to infringe on the *divine right* of tythes, and may be told, that Moſes himſelf allotted to the Prieſts, "all the beſt of the oil, and all the beſt of the wine and of the wheat, together with the tenth of the land of Iſrael:" To theſe, and ſuch like arguments from the ſcriptures, *our laws* anſwer for me, and expreſsly ſay, "Tythes are not payable of divine right, but by the laws of the land." Now, as the legiſlature, which is compoſed of our repreſentatives, have taken the matter into their own hands, it is no impiety in us to remonſtrate to them, the hardſhips of thoſe parts of the tythe-laws which remain ſtill uncorrected.

It ſhould be underſtood, that the tythe-laws were not originally framed by an Engliſh Parliament, but by a Popiſh Council in the reign of King John, who debaſed his own dignity, and that of his people, ſo far as to reſign his Crown twice to Pope Innocent the Third. Theſe laws were admitted with other eccleſiaſtical decrees,

and

and have ſince been confirmed by our legiſlature, whenever they were not repugnant to the King's prerogative, nor to the laws and cuſtoms of this realm. The antient rule was, that tythes were *due for every thing*; and in Popiſh times the revenues ariſing from them were much more conſiderable than they are at preſent. In proceſs of time different orders of men have contrived to eaſe themſelves, in various ſhapes, of the unreaſonableneſs of this tax, ſome getting it converted into a rate, others into a modus, &c. By an antient ſtatute, the Citizens of London were obliged to pay yearly to their Parſons two ſhillings and nine-pence for every twenty ſhillings rent of houſes, ſhops, &c. and ſo in proportion. In King Charles the Second's time, the whole tythes of London were reduced to a certainty, from two hundred pounds per annum, the greateſt incomes of Rectors, to one hundred, the loweſt, to be levied by rate and aſſeſſment. Beſides this inſtance a modus is eſtabliſhed in many cities and towns corporate, by act of parliament. So that you ſee, though the original tythe-laws were never totally repealed, they have undergone occaſional alterations; and this is ſufficient to ſhew, that the legiſlature can, at any time, interfere in regulating this pretended divine right. The truth is, this pretended divine right was formerly ſuffered to ride the whole Kingdom, but is now ſuffered only to ride the Farmer.

It remains, therefore, to be conſidered, whether ſo valuable a body of men as the Landholders are not deſerving the relief of Parliament in

this reſpect, as well as the reſt of their countrymen.

To form a judgment of the great diſproportion the Landholders pay to the Church, comparatively with every other member of the community, let us ſuppoſe a Farmer to rent a farm of one hundred pounds per annum; it is allowed, that, by great induſtry and good fortune, it will yield to the value of three hundred pounds per annum; conſequently, if he pays in *kind*, he will have to the value of thirty pounds a year to pay to the Rector. But of the three hundred pounds produce, he has one hundred to pay to his landlord, and another in charges of cultivation: ſo that the thirty pounds for tythe are deducted from the remaining hundred. Now if the Farmer pays thirty pound in one hundred of his profits, the man of ten thouſand per annum clear, ſhould pay three thouſand. The juſtice of this is ſo indiſputable, that the only anſwer to it can be that the landlord allows for that ſum in his rents. But *if it ſhould not be true*, what an impoſition is it that his tenants ſhould contribute three thouſand pounds per annum to the church, and he eſcape almoſt tythe-free, upon *the mere ſuppoſition* of ſuch allowance. This we are ſure of, *that the Farmers pay it*, but it is *not demonſtrable* that ſuch a landlord contributes *a ſingle penny*. The utmoſt he is *known* to pay is on his own account, for the pleaſure grounds about his manſion-houſe, and a ſmall modus for his town-houſe; while his tenants may juſtly be called the pillars of the church.

The

The merchant, the artiſt, the trader, the handicraft, and thoſe who enjoy great incomes by wages and fees, ſuch as placemen, lawyers, and phyſicians, if they live in towns, whatever may be the emoluments or profits of their various profeſſions, are exempted from tythes by a ſmall modus. If they live in the country, do they, as the law exacts, contribute *a tenth of their profits*, all expences paid? Even if they did, they would ſtill have the advantage of the Farmer, who pays the tythe of both; for if an acre of land yields a produce of five pounds a year, and he, to improve it, has the ſpirit to manure it at the expence of forty ſhillings, and in conſequence of the improvement, it yields ten pounds, the tythe, from being ten ſhillings, becomes twenty; ſo that four ſhillings is taken for money out of his pocket, and ſix more for his good huſbandry. This ſure is an exciſe of a moſt pernicious influence, and not calculated to diſcourage vice and immorality, but a profeſſion equal to any in hardſhips, inferior to any in profits, but from which originally ſpring the riches and proſperity of all.

The ingenious Mr. Young, in his Farmers Letters (where he has nobly exerted himſelf on the ſubject of other grievances you labour under from the Poor Laws) has a calculation, "That if the rental of all England amounts to twenty millions, the product of the land cannot be leſs than eighty millions, the tythe of which is eight millions, which wants but a fifth part of equalling the ſum total of all taxes paid to government." Let any one aſcertain the amount of the tythes

tythes paid by the *Landowners*, and all other claſſes of men put together, and compare it with this, which is liable to be paid ſolely by the *Landholders*.

That every pariſh ſhould maintain its own Rector, is a point that *ſeems* to carry great appearance of juſtice in it; but the plauſible fallacy of it is the ſource of the Farmers oppreſſion. The conſequence of this rule is, that London, and other great towns, where almoſt all the wealth of the kingdom is gathered together, have a very ſmall number of Clergy to maintain in compariſon of thoſe ſupported by agriculture; and till *Government* makes a proviſion for the Church, as it has done for the Army, it cannot be otherwiſe. The diſproportion of the wealth of pariſhes has aboliſhed the cuſtom of tythe in all towns corporate; or how immenſely lucrative would be the benefices of the pariſhes in London? Attention has been paid to one end of the balance, and not to the other; to bring it to an equipoiſe, if the redundancy of tythe in the capital would be too great a revenue for the Clergy of it, the deficiency in the country, where the people was proportionably relieved, ought to be made up by a law that ſhould bear equitably on all.

In this view, the propoſal for allotting a certain portion of land in every pariſh to the Rector, will never be countenanced by men of landed property; for they are ſenſible that their tenants will throw the burthen of it upon them, and that it will affect ſcarce any but themſelves: The placeman,

placeman, the ſtockholder, the merchant, if they live in towns, will be exempt from it; a very ſufficient reaſon that ſuch an alteration in the tythe-laws has not yet taken place; and indeed, though in ſome reſpects a moſt deſirable meaſure, it never can take place *equitably*, unleſs the land is *purchaſed by government*, and a tax levied for that purpoſe throughout the whole kingdom.

Hitherto I have ſpoken only of the diſproportionate ſhare the Farmer pays towards the revenues of the Church; but he is as much diſtinguiſhed by the ſeverity of the mode of collecting them. Any other man can ſtand on his own ground, and warn off any ſtranger that incommodes him; but the Farmer muſt ſubmit to the viſits of the Parſon, who may overlook him like an Egyptian taſk-maſter, or a modern exciſeman; preſcribe to him in his own lawful occupation, lay claim to corn that he has not ſown, while the farmer toils even to bind into ſheaves. Clergymen, in ſuch a ſituation, have need of all the virtues of their profeſſion, to preſerve them from the hatred of their pariſhoners: Of this they are ſo well convinced, that many ſubmit to impoſition, rather than degrade the dignity of their character by an attention ſo much beneath it. To this liberal way of thinking are we indebted for the cuſtom of compounding; which though it lightens the burthen of this tax but in a ſmall degree, yet it re-eſtabliſhes the Farmer in the rights of an Engliſhman, by enabling him to cultivate his land in whatever manner is moſt conducive either to his pleaſure or his profit.

Beſides,

Beſides, the payment of tythes in kind is ſo contrary to all principles of liberty and property, that I wonder it has prevailed ſo long. Is it agreeable to the principles of liberty, that a Landholder may not manage his land as he thinks proper? But our law-books ſay, that if a pariſhioner does not ſow his land uſually ſown, the Parſon may bring his action; neither will any reaſons of convenience or danger juſtify the Farmer for houſing the fruits of his own induſtry, till he has divided it into ſmall parcels, that the Rector may take his tythe. Then, as to property, except a man has tranſgreſſed the law, his property in this kingdom is always ſacred; but to the Farmer an exaction of tythes in kind, is worſe than a diſtreſs for debt; for if the debt is paid, his corn, or whatever was diſtrained, is releaſed; but it is in vain to tender a compoſition to the Rector that inſiſts on his tythe; he may anſwer as inexorably as Shylock in the play, "I crave the law," and carry off the Farmer's property, though he is willing to compound for it. I would aſk, whether the King, or any inferior officer of government, can exerciſe a power equal to this? Or why the Landholders ſhould be *the only remaining ſlaves of the tyrannical inſtitutions of Popery?*

How much more grievous is this cuſtom when exacted by a *Layman:* When a tax is impoſed for a purpoſe to which we know it was never intended to be applied, we naturally feel the grievance more ſenſibly; and notwithſtanding the lay-impropriators are as well entitled to it (as a matter of

property

property) as they are to their eſtates, yet there is ſuch a perverſion of common ſenſe, ſuch a proſtitution of power in the very face of it, that greatly aggravates all the other circumſtances.

There is no law ſo wiſe and univerſal in its nature, as to be ſuited to all places and to all ages. The defects in the tythe laws are evident, from the alterations they have already undergone; and it is as evident, that their oppreſſive ſeverity calls aloud for further reformation. The Clergy themſelves, at leaſt the liberal and unbigotted part of them, moſt ſincerely wiſh it: No doubt it would be an acquiſition to them, to have the juſt value of their livings reduced to a certainty, and paid to them in a manner more conſiſtent with the dignity of their ſtation; to have a harmony eſtabliſhed between them and their pariſhioners, which would unite them in affection (to uſe a ſcriptural phraſe) "as one fold under one ſhepherd."

This is a ſubject that has employed much abler pens; but all the powers of truth and reaſon exhauſted in mere writing, are only admired and thrown aſide. In caſes that require and deſerve redreſs, a more pointed application is neceſſary than to the public at large; therefore it behoves you, who are the *only people* who feel the oppreſſion, to conſult together on market days, and to draw up a petition, ſetting forth all your grievances on this ſubject, which ſhould be circulated to other market towns in the counties where you

reſide; and when ſigned by a reſpectable number* of Landholders (many of whom will be Freeholders) may be conveyed to your reſpective repreſentatives in Parliament, with inſtructions to lay it before the Houſe. The point you ought particularly to labour is, to be relieved from the payment of tythes in KIND, ſubmitting that part of the grievance, reſpecting the great diſproportion of the tax, to the wiſdom of Parliament; and there is great reaſon to expect, (as is expreſſed in a late Addreſs from one part of the Clergy to the other) that "The petition will ſupport itſelf, not by the dignity or number of the perſons who prefer it, but by the intrinſic merit and moderation of its claim; for there is a perpetual obligation upon the legiſlature, to attend to and redreſs the grievances of the ſubject, although ſuch remonſtrance ſhould proceed from the meaneſt of the people."

A Petition, thus conducted with decency and moderation, from ſo numerous and valuable a part of the community, cannot fail of carrying its due weight along with it; it will have the good wiſhes

---

* By ſtatute, the ſoliciting, labouring, or procuring, the hands or conſent of above *twenty perſons* to any petition to the King, or either houſe of parliament for alterations in church or ſtate, unleſs by aſſent of three or more Juſtices of the Peace, or a majority of the Grand Jury at the aſſizes or ſeſſions; and repairing to the King and Parliament to deliver ſuch petition with above the number of *ten perſons*, is ſubject to a fine of 100l. and three months impriſonment, being proved by two witneſſes in ſix months in the Kings-Bench, or at the aſſizes. 13 Car. 2. Cap. 5.

wiſhes and aſſiſtance of all friends of liberty and agriculture, whether within the Houſe or out of it. And whatever tends to promote and encourage ſuch important objects, has the faireſt claim to engage the patriotic ſpirit and patronage of a *Rockingham*.

---

## LETTER II.

I Have intimated, in the foregoing letter, that a man of ten thouſand per ann. clear of all taxes, but tythes, does not contribute to the maintenance of the church in proportion to the Farmer: but as there are many people who aſſert the contrary, I ſhall examine into the truth of this aſſertion; and the rather becauſe it is ſometimes maintained even by the friends of agriculture, and conſequently the Farmer (through a natural averſion in him to quit the road of his forefathers) may continue to ſubmit to the yoke of church tyranny, by placing too much confidence in an opinion utterly unſupported by proof.

It has been frequently ſaid that " whatever tythes the Farmer pays he has a proportional abatement in his rent." Which if it means any thing, means this, that any given quantity of land has a certain value per acre per ann. and that the landlord makes an equitable deduction

for the tythes his tenant will be obliged to pay; from which is drawn this inference, that the tenant is not ſo much aggrieved by the tythe laws as he imagines, becauſe his landlord makes him an allowance.

Now I ſhall be glad to be acquainted with that accurate judge of the value of land, who through all its gradations, in all its various natures, and their various mixtures; from its vicinity to markets, roads, and rivers; its incloſures; its local advantages and diſadvantges with regard to cuſtoms, poors rates, the price of labour, &c. &c. can fix *a preciſe rule* by which a conſcientious landlord can lett his farms according to their real value. Till this is done, it is evidently *ſpeaking at random* to ſay that allowance is made for tythes. But I will ſuppoſe ſuch an eſtimate to be made with the utmoſt preciſion, and that a Farmer is in treaty for 100 acres intrinſically worth a pound an acre: he ought at leaſt to pay only for ninety; and this, though it is never practiſed, would be thought by many people a ſufficient allowance. But the moſt that can be ſaid is, that the landlord contributes *equally* with the Farmer: for of the thirty pounds which I ſuppoſe the produce in tythe, one third is given in rent by the landlord, another in labour by the farmer, and the reſt by Providence. But to admit that the landlord contributes equally is granting *too much:* for though I reckon the farmer's time and labour but as ten pounds, yet it is of more than double that value; becauſe, what he thus dedicates to the church, was it employed for himſelf, would yield him

the

the very produce he is obliged to ſurrender to the Rector.

Since then there is no certainty of an allowance for tythe in the valuation of land, nor even the ſhadow of it by a deduction of ten acres in a hundred, what ſecurity has the farmer, which ought to ſatisfy him, that the whole tythe is not paid out of his own pocket? his ſecurity is not to be ſought for in the luxury of the times: that is a ſhrine at which induſtry, as well as honour, is frequently ſacrificed. In ſhort, his beſt ſecurity is to obtain an abolition of the tythe laws: for till then he will generally be made the dupe both of the landowners and the Clergy, he will both pay the rent of theſe ten acres, and the expences attending their cultivation; and after all for whom? not for himſelf, but for a ſtranger, who has no *original right* to the produce either in law or juſtice. Tell me, ye Patriots, is this the boaſted liberty of England!

The maintenance of the Clergy, being aſſigned to the produce of the land, has by that means been inſenſibly transferred from the landowners to to their tenants. And there can be no doubt, but the land-tax will take the ſame courſe, when the preſent practice of foiſting it into leaſes ſhall be grown more univerſal. The conſequence of which will be, that the Farmer will have nothing but *the honour of his landlord* to ſecure him againſt an exorbitant encreaſe of that tax; for when the lawmakers are exempt from the effects of it, the time may come when eight ſhillings in the

pound

pound will be granted with as much eaſe as four.*

The ſame reaſon, which would make them careleſs about the exorbitancy of the land-tax, at preſent renders them as patient under the iniquity of the tythe laws; for from the attention of every man to his own intereſt, the landowners, who compoſe the legiſlature, would never ſubmit to ſupply the revenues of the church ſolely from the produce of the land, if they did not know that the Farmer had ignorantly taken the burthen upon himſelf. Becauſe the aggregate wealth of all other claſſes of men put together is much too conſiderable to require that compliment. For, according to Mr. Young's calculation, the income ariſing from agriculture alone throughout the kingdom, is upwards of ſixty millions, and that of all other profeſſions and purſuits in life about as much more. Now as agriculture only is tytheable, one half the income of all England is exempted from this odious tax. Conſequently, if the landlord allows his tenant for tythes, he, with the legiſlative power in his own hands, willingly and generouſly maintains the whole body of the clergy at his own expence. This is ſo incredible, that with me it is a preſumptive proof to the contrary; and that a man of ten thouſand a year inſtead of paying three thouſand, or even two,

* This innovation will prove not only prejudicial to agriculture, but introduce a fraud in all thoſe levies which may depend on the rack rent.

two, to this purpoſe, leaves it to his tenants to ſhare the burthen among themſelves.

How neceſſary then is it for the relief of the landholders, that ſome method ſhould be taken to enforce a more general contribution. At preſent, it is confined to a body of men whoſe conſtant induſtry and ſimplicity of life render them leſs ſubject to vices than any other: ſo that in a *political view*, an eccleſiaſtical eſtabliſhment is much *leſs* neceſſary upon *their* account. The ſpiritual lights, that are hung out for the direction of thoſe expoſed to ſtorms and quick ſands, are of little benefit to ſuch as are anchored in the ſtill harbour of ſecurity; and yet, by a ſtrange perverſion of juſtice, thoſe who are leaſt intereſted are obliged to furniſh *all the beſt of the oil.*

After all, if the landholders by their power and influence can relieve the farmer in this reſpect, it will be ultimately ſerving themſelves; for whatever law operates towards the encouragement of agriculture, tends to the improvement of eſtates: but at preſent (to uſe Mr. Young's own words on on this ſubject) "thoſe who cultivate their fields in a truly accurate and huſband-like manner, feel the weight of this tax in its heavieſt form; whereas the ſlovenly Farmer, who acts in a direct contrary manner, is ſure of an exemption nearly on his own terms: for the difference of value in tythes is prodigious, though taken both at ſo much in the pound. This circumſtance therefore creates a conſtantly acting obſtruction to improvements; for the Farmer who rented his lands in expectation of compounding as well as his predeceſſor, finding

finding that this vigorous cultivation is the ſignal for a heavy and irkſome tax upon his diligence, rather gives up a proſpect of profit, than ſubmit to a burthen that is laid upon him *becauſe he is induſtrious.*"

Beſides, the tythe laws in our days are much more intolerable than at their firſt inſtitution by Moſes, for the people were obliged to him for all the bleſſings they enjoy'd; it was he who brought them out of captivity into a land flowing with milk and honey; for this land they paid no rent, but received a conſiderable addition to their own ſhare, as ſome compenſation for the tythe they conſented to pay: ſo that their ſituation was eaſier, and their contributions rendered more pleaſing by a ſenſe of gratitude to their benefactor. But in theſe times, the tythe laws have not one qualifying circumſtance attending them. Still I truſt this odious exotic, which extends its pernicious ſhade, and deſtroys the valuable produce of this free country, ſhall e'er long be rooted up. The ſpirited clubs of landholders, already aſſociated, will create an emulation in other parts of the kingdom: and ſince agriculture is become the favourite ſtndy of the rural philoſopher, and gentlemen of all ranks take delight in it, the unlettered farmer can never want aſſiſtance in drawing up his petition to parliament for relief.* Even were it otherwiſe, the juſtice of their cauſe

* This alludes to an advertiſement dated from Norfolk, requeſting the author to draw up a ſketch of a petition, which was complied with by the following: The

cauſe requires no aid from language, but if well ſupported by a proper number of creditable names, the

---

The humble Petition of the Landholders and Farmers of the County of N———

*Sheweth,*

That the cauſe your Petitioners now ſubmit to this honourable Houſe, is the cauſe of the Landholders of the whole kingdom, who, as a body, are the moſt numerous of any other; the ſtock from which all the other branches of the community derive their ſupport, therefore they humbly conceive, deſerving the attention of this honourable Houſe, and of every benefit reſulting from the liberty of the conſtitution, which is enjoyed by their fellow-ſubjects. On this, and no other ground, do your Petitioners preſume to ſupplicate redreſs.

That they apprehend the tythe-laws now ſubſiſting are repugnant to every idea of juſtice and of liberty; of juſtice, becauſe they fix by much the greateſt part of the maintenance of the clergy on the produce of the land; of liberty, becauſe they empower the ſaid clergy to force an entrance into any part of their lands and tenements, under pretence of fetching away their tythe, and enable them to vex your Petitioners with ſuits at law whenever land uſually ſown is neglected.

That your Petitioners are convinced, that the tythe-laws are not only grievous to themſelves, but extremely detrimental to the public; inaſmuch as the tax impoſed by them acts as a conſtant obſtruction to good huſbandry; which, being the parent of plenty, can produce no more than in proportion to the encouragement it receives.

That the preſent ſtate of the tythe-laws is not only oppreſſive to agriculture, but attended with ſuch frequent diſputes and litigations, and ſo deſtructive of that Chriſtian charity that ought to ſubſiſt between the clergy and your Petitioners, as renders it inſupportably grievous to both; by which means too the purpoſes for which the clergy were ordained, and your Petitioners thus heavily taxed, are in a great meaſure defeated.

the abilities of our patriots, on ſo popular a ſubject, will amply ſupply every other deficiency.

---

That the ſaid grievances take their riſe from the antient decrees of Popiſh Councils, ſtill ſuffered to tyrannize over your Petitioners; though, in favour of their fellow-ſubjects, they have been corrected by various acts of parliament. That notwithſtanding it may be pretended that the landowners allow for the payment of tythes in their leaſes, yet your Petitioners have no poſitive ſecurity of ſuch allowance. That, if the landowners of this kingdom think proper to take the burthen of this tax on themſelves, to the great eaſe of the reſt of the community, your Petitioners muſt, and are willing to ſubmit to any fixed parochial tax, in the room of tythes in kind, which this honourable Houſe may think a proper proportion for the inferiority of their ſituation.

That as your Petitioners cannot remain inſenſible of the aforeſaid grievances, notwithſtanding the authority they have obtained by long uſage, ſo your Petitioners hope that theſe oppreſſions, in their moſt venerable form, will not be protected from ſuch a free diſcuſſion in this honourable Houſe, as will be productive of relief to your Petitioners, and tend to the advantages of agriculture.

Your Petitioners, in conſideration of the premiſes, do now humbly ſupplicate this honourable Houſe, in hope of obtaining ſuch redreſs as is conſiſtent with the fair rights of Engliſhmen over the produce of their own induſtry; of Engliſhmen long releaſed from the ſuperſtitions of Popery, and living under a government eſtabliſhed on the principles of equal law and liberty; who have an undoubted claim to ſtand on the footing of the reſt of their countrymen, abſolutely free upon their own poſſeſſions, as long as they are innocent of any tranſgreſſion againſt the laws; with theſe hopes, and under theſe pretenſions, they ſubmit their cauſe to the wiſdom and equity of a Britiſh Parliament.

And your Petitioners ſhall ever pray, &c.

## LETTER III.

AS I have begun my attack on the tythe laws, it is my intention to purſue the ſubject, till the moſt common farmer ſhall be as familiar with it, as his flail or his ploughſhare. Under the maſk of religion, even a fraud, while it tended to the public good, I would hold ſacred; but in this inſtance, where its effect is diametrically oppoſite, I will uſe my endeavours to expoſe it. With this reſolution, I am happy in borrowing aſſiſtance from the greateſt genius of the age. The genuine ſtrokes of Voltaire's pen, will give the cauſe ſuch advantages, as even the ſame ſpirit infuſed into the compoſitions of another, can never effect; for this purpoſe, I have tranſlated one of his ſections on canonical rights, from his queſtions on the Encyclopœdia, entitled,

*Of the* POSSESSIONS *of the* CLERGY.

" WE ſhould always recur to the principles of ſociety, which ought to be the foundation of all rights, enjoyed either by civil or eccleſiaſtical bodies.

" The community at large is the proprietor of the land in all nations, which is the ſource of the national revenue. This community, *as proprietor*, gives up a portion of this national revenue to the Sovereign, to ſupply the expences of government.

Each individual remains ſole Lord of whatever part *(it being his ſingle property)* the laws were firſt made to ſecure to him. Neither can any poſſeſſion, or property, be ſuppoſed exempt from the authority of the laws.

" In the ſtate of ſociety, we hold no goods, no poſſeſſions whatever, ſolely from nature, becauſe we have renounced all natural rights, and ſubmitted ourſelves to thoſe civil inſtitutions, which are our ſecurity and protection; therefore, it is from the laws that we hold all our poſſeſſions.

" Neither can we hold any thing on the grounds of religion, neither goods nor eſtates, for " my kingdom is not of this world," ſaith our Saviour; therefore, no poſſeſſions here can be of right divine.

" The Levites, under the Hebrew law, had, we will grant, a tenth, by the expreſs command of God, and he himſelf was their King. That government is now diſſolved, and *the preſent Jews do not admit of tythes.** Moſt of the other laws of this Divine Legiſlator are fallen into diſuſe, and cannot ſerve in theſe days as a title to poſſeſſion.

" If any body of men in the preſent age, like the clergy, ſhould pretend to a claim of tythe, or any other revenue, by a poſitive divine right, it would be neceſſary for them to produce a title, regiſtered in ſome divine revelation, perfectly clear

---

* Selden.

clear and inconteſtible. Such a miraculous title as this would, I own, be an exception to that civil law authoriſed by God, and *univerſal compact*. "That every one ſhould ſubmit to the ſuperior powers, becauſe they are ordained by God, and eſtabliſhed in his name."

"Without ſuch a title, no eccleſiaſtical body can hold any poſſeſſions, but by the conſent of the Sovereign, and under the authority of the laws. This can be their only claim to any thing they enjoy; if they ſhould be ſo imprudent as to renounce it, they have no other. But deſpiſing the protection of the laws, they might be ſtripped of every thing, by any one who has the power to effect it. It is then the eſſential intereſt of the church to depend on civil ſociety, who alone gives it its daily bread.

"By the ſame reaſon as all the eſtates, real and perſonal, of a nation are, without exception, liable to public taxes, for the ſupport of the government, none can be exempted but by the laws; and the laws themſelves are repealable, whenever circumſtances require it. John a Nokes cannot be exempted from a tax, but Tom a Stiles muſt pay for it; ſo that equity having a perpetual claim to reduce unequal taxes to a juſt proportion, the Sovereign has, at any time, a right to enquire into exemptions, and reſtore things to a natural and well poiſed equilibrium, by aboliſhing whatever immunities are extorted, allowed, or connived at.

"Any

" Any law that ordains that the Prince ſhould provide for the ſecurity of any particular body of men at the public expence, and yet this particular body ſhould not contribute its ſhare to the charges of government, is a ſubverſion of juſtice.

" Nay more, the proportion of every tax impoſed upon any individual, or body of men, ſhould be regulated, not by the party itſelf, but by the Prince or Magiſtrates, according to the general rule of law; conſequently, they ought to know, and have a power to demand, a true ſtate of the revenues of theſe, as well as of other bodies of men.

" Upon theſe principles, immutable in their nature, ſhould be raiſed the foundation of the canon law, as far as relates to the revenues and poſſeſſions of the clergy.

" The clergy ought moſt certainly to have wherewithal to live honourably, not as members of the church, *but of the ſtate*; for the church itſelf has no domains, no poſſeſſions here on earth. But as it is juſt that they who preach the Goſpel, ſhould live by the Goſpel, it is natural that they ſhould be ſupported by the community, as well as the magiſtrates and the army; therefore it belongs to the civil law, to appoint a ſuitable ſalary for the eccleſiaſtical body.

" Even where church lands have been given by will, or any other manner, the donors could not render them ſacred from the demands of government, nor from the authority of the laws; otherwiſe ſuch gifts could not be warranted by

law,

law, and without it the clergy cannot be ſecured in the poſſeſſion of them.*

" It is the duty of the Prince to examine, at all times, if the revenues of the clergy are ſufficient; if not, to augment their ſalaries; but if manifeſtly exorbitant, to diſpoſe of the overplus to the general good of the community.

" But according to the principles of the laws, commonly called canonical, which have tended to make a ſtate within a ſtate, an empire within an empire, the poſſeſſions of the clergy are ſacred, and not to be touched; becauſe, it is pretended they belong to religion and the church, and are derived from God, and not from men.

" But earthly things cannot belong to religion, which lays no claim to any thing temporal; they cannot belong to the church, for the church is the whole body of the faithful, the magiſtrates, the army, and the people; for we ſhould never forget

---

* In anſwer to this poſition of Voltaire, it may be ſaid, " May I give a churchman a fee, and ſhall I not have liberty to give him my eſtate?" To the man you may, but you muſt not annex it to his benefice; becauſe, if it could be ſuppoſed that the men of landed property were as liable to be prieſt-ridden, as thoſe of no property at all, the greateſt part of this kingdom might be delivered over to a body of men, who, *even now*, preſcribe laws repugnant to general equity, and would then wreſt the dominion out of the hands of that Prince, where the conſent of the community has placed it. It muſt be obſerved, that the foregoing is not a mere ſuppoſition, ſince it was realized in this very kingdom before the Reformation, when the church maintained an abſolute authority, of which our tythe laws are the relics.

forget, that the clergy is no more the church, than the magiſtrates are the ſtate.

" In ſhort, their livings are derived from God, but as all other good things which his Providence has beſtowed upon us; ſo that they hold them as ſubjects and citizens of the commonwealth, under no other protection than the civil law.

" Thoſe things which are material and temporal, cannot be either ſacred or holy, in any ſenſe, real or figurative. If a building is ſaid to be holy, it means no more than that it is ſet apart for ſpiritual uſes; but to pervert a mode of ſpeaking, for the purpoſes of eſtabliſhing rights and claims, deſtructive of ſociety *and natural juſtice, is a praſtice diſgraceful to the preachers of true holineſs*, notwithſtanding the hiſtory of the church furniſhes ſo many examples of it."

I am very ſenſible, that the foregoing will not be underſtood by the generality of thoſe for whoſe benefit it is tranſlated; but it will ſerve as a gag to their enemies. The additions in Italics are the only liberties I have taken with it. I intended them to help that oracular conciſeneſs of the original, which in a very maſterly manner, reduces all eccleſiaſtical poſſeſſions within the authority of the laws, becauſe the clergy have no right to them but as *members of the ſtate*. This is a very obvious truth to the more enlightened, but the generality are ſo blinded by cuſtom, and a ſuperſtitious reverence for every thing that relates to the clergy, that it will be neceſſary to examine this

ſub

ject more at large, before it will be ſufficiently underſtood to create that univerſal abhorrence of the tythe laws, which they ſo juſtly deſerve.

---

## LETTER IV.

THE tythe laws may juſtly be called the knavery of ages, for there is no impoſture ſo eſtabliſhed, none ſo ancient, and none more real. But age and preſcription cannot alter their nature, and ſhall not ſcreen them from detection. They were begot by power, nurſed by ſuperſtition, and trained up by policy. To trace them through every ſtage, would require the learning and application of a Selden. But it is to be hoped, that my deluded countrymen need not ranſack the muſty records of antiquity to defend themſelves againſt a noon-day robbery. If violence and oppreſſion are not certain when they are *felt*, but the ſenſes muſt be ſuſpended till ſophiſtry has argued upon the caſe, the peaſant, inſtead of driving the plough, may be ſentenced to draw it; and learning, from being his protector, would become his tyrant.

I muſt confeſs, the more I conſider the tythe laws, the greater is my contempt for them; but I ſhould be ſorry to be miſunderſtood. I reve-

rence the clergy as a body, as much as I deteſt thoſe individuals of it, who diſtinguiſh themſelves as *tythe gatherers*. I look upon theſe laſt to be as oppoſite to the character of a good paſtor, as a mountebank is to a ſkilful phyſician, or a Newgate ſolicitor to an upright lawyer. So that in purſuing this ſubject, wherever I mention the church with any degree of aſperity, I mean only thoſe members of it who by their practice or opinions, are attached to this ſcandalous cuſtom *without any excuſe from neceſſity*. Having premiſed this, I will proceed to the performance of my promiſe, which was to render the nature and origin of tythes familiar to thoſe whoſe occupation and rank in life debar them from the power of ſearching into theſe impoſitions, though they ſo nearly concern themſelves.

Religion, excluſive of its being a natural duty, is a univerſal and neceſſary ingredient in all governments; it is not only the ſpring of every virtue, but aſſiſts the civil power by wholeſome admonitions to the people, and by warning them againſt thoſe crimes, which would ſubject them to the puniſhment of the laws. It follows then, that every ſtate ſhould ſet apart a certain number of its members to officiate in the various ceremonies of the eſtabliſhed church, and to teach the people their duty. Theſe men devoting their lives to ſuch important ſervices, and at the ſame time recommending virtue by their own practice of it, deſerve both an honourable proviſion, and a reſpectable rank in ſociety. In this it is evident, the good of the whole ſociety is concerned; the

contributions therefore ſhould be general. On theſe principles, Moſes allotted to the Levites a tenth of all the lands of Iſrael. He divided the promiſed land according to their tribes; ſo that the Levites, *by that proportion*, were intitled to a twelfth. But as he appointed them to the ſervice of religion, he ordained, that *they* ſhould give up their portion, and *have no inheritance in the land*; but in lieu of it, be intitled to a tythe of the whole.

If this proviſion for the prieſthood was exorbitant, it was in conſideration of ſervices, and reſigning all other proſpects of ſharing in the riches of the community. From this original inſtitution of Moſes, the clergy of our times derive their claim of tythes; but though they pretend to bind us by their Jewiſh law, they do not think themſelves obliged to give up their inheritance as Engliſhmen, in conformity to the other part of it. Here then our modern prieſts have contrived to make a better proviſion for themſelves, than even Moſes had done, notwithſtanding his partiality to his own tribe, and his power both as high-prieſt and law-giver: Our clergy then have no right to tythes under the Moſaical law, ſince they do not obſerve the whole of that law. Beſides, the Jewiſh Doctors affirm, that at the deſtruction of the Temple, tythes ceaſed even among themſelves; neither do they at this day obſerve the cuſtom. It is true, they have no land, but then they have a better reaſon to exact perſonal tythes; a much better than our clergy, who have a power to de-

mand them by law, though they dare not put that law in execution.

In the early days of Chriſtianity, the Apoſtles themſelves, *though they were filled with the Holy Ghoſt*, did not begin their miniſtry with the abſurd claim of a *divine right* of tythes, not even among thoſe devout communicants, whom their preaching had converted. Chriſt, foreſeeing that the doctrines he taught, ſuch as charity and brotherly love, would produce a ſupport fully ſufficient for that moderation and ſelf-denial he recommended to his diſciples, bade them "forſake all, and follow him;" bade them "conſider the fowls of the air, and the lillies of the field, and like them take no thought of what they ſhould eat, or wherewithal they ſhould be clothed." The event juſtified his expectations, for "the multitude of them that believed were of one heart, neither ſaid any of them, that aught of the things they poſſeſſed was their own; for as many as were poſſeſſed of lands and houſes ſold them, and brought the money, and laid it down at the Apoſtles feet, and they had all things in common."

In a ſhort time after the diſciples had been ſo provident, as to have acquired a ſpecial ability and eſtate of their own in Galatia, and St. Paul found that his influence enabled him to reduce theſe free will offerings of piety to fixed rules, and ordained weekly offerings of all the ſaints (an appellation by which they diſtinguiſhed themſelves, as well as the ſectariſts in our days). In the next ages monthly offerings took place; but then

the

the Biſhops appointed to receive them, were ſtewards for other purpoſes, beſides their own private emoluments. They buried the poor, and relieved thoſe that were in diſtreſs; ſo that (to ſpeak in a modern phraſe) the tythes *included the poor's rate.* From theſe beginnings lands were given, and *fixed ſalaries* appointed for the Miniſters of the Goſpel. Here it is evident, that in theſe firſt 400 years of Chriſtianity, the Jewiſh claim of a divine right of tythes was utterly diſcontinued, and that the revenues of the church were derived from the mere increaſe of power and property, through the influence and policy of its founders. This period may be diſtinguiſhed as the firſt ſtrides of eccleſiaſtical dominion.

About the cloſe of this laſt period, laws were made by Chriſtian Emperors, for the payment of a tythe of mines and quarries to themſelves, and the Lords of the ſoil. *From hence* aroſe the *cuſtom* of paying tythe to the church, which, by courſe of time, became general. From the force of example, the omiſſion was looked upon as a reproach; and the reprehenſion of it by clergymen, aſſumed the arrogance of a claim. Could ſuch men want the craft at this criſis, to revive the plea of right from the Moſaical inſtitutions? Thus, as the poet ſays, "Ill habits gather by unſeen degrees."

About the year 470, tythes were ſo faſhionable, that Chriſtians gave tythe to the poor, and the church availed itſelf of this charitable diſpoſition, to illuſtrate their own, by taking this opportunity

portunity to get the poor off their hands, and engroſs the church tythe (of which they had been uſed to give them a ſhare) entirely to their own uſe. This was the ſecond gradation of eccleſiaſtical power.

About the year 600, tythes, from being eſtabliſhed as a cuſtom, now became, *in ſome inſtances*, a legal right, becauſe eſtates were bequeathed under the condition, that the tythe of them ſhould be paid to particular churches; and likewiſe regular grants were paſſed for the ſame purpoſes. Theſe very facts are a ſufficient proof, that without ſuch methods the clergy had not any legal claim to them. It is pretended, that the power of the church had enacted ſome laws of their own, to compel the payment of tythes about this time; but the truth of it is much doubted, and whether with reaſon or not, is nothing to us. This is the laſt ſtate of eccleſiaſtical revenues, previous to their eſtabliſhment among the laws of the land.

Having then, in a curſory manner, ſhewn, that the tenth given to the Levites, was partly owing to their being entitled to a twelfth, partly to the partiality Moſes muſt have for the prieſthood, ſince it was veſted in his own family and tribe; that the clergy of theſe days have no ſuch rights, and yet poſſeſs greater privileges; that ſince Chriſtianity took place, the revenues of the church, for the firſt 400 years, were confined to free gifts; that the next gradation was ſtill a free gift, but in the form of a tythe, in imitation of a

law

law that had not the moſt diſtant reference to the church; and that that which followed, was no more than a *cuſtom* of tythe, held by bequeſts and other formal grants; in all which, the dependance of the clergy on the laity is evident. I ſhall proceed to ſearch into thoſe foul annals of prieſtcraft, whence tythes, with all the falſehood and ſubtlety of the old ſerpent, inſinuated themſelves into the laws of this kingdom, and being poſſeſſed of that ſtrong hold, are grown obnoxious to the liberty and induſtry of the Engliſh farmer; and, happily for them, the ſame power that has ſolemnly ſtripped them of their ancient armour, *divine right*, is itſelf become their protector, at a time when neither religion, juſtice, nor even ſuperſtition could poſſibly avail them.

LET-

## LETTER V.

WHEN legiſlators are under the influence of any ruling power, ſuch as tyranny, ſuperſtition or corruption, it is not fitting that they ſhould preſide over the rights and liberties of any people, much leſs that their laws ſhould extend to the prejudice of more enlightened ages. Theſe are ſelf-evident truths, and very applicable to our future conſiderations of the tythe laws.

It is my intention to ſtrike at the very root of theſe abuſes, by ſhewing that they do not owe their origin in England, either to a divine right, or to the free *uninfluenced* deliberations of our anceſtors; and for this purpoſe ſhall, from the authority of hiſtorical facts, without loading my argument with many quotations, trace their progreſſion from the conſequences of thoſe facts. In my laſt, I brought up the cuſtom of tythes to an abſolute right, as far as could be eſtabliſhed by the legacies and grants of private perſons.

It is very natural to conclude, that if an omiſſion in the payment of tythes, when they were perfectly voluntary, was aggravated by the clergy into a crime, that having acquired a legal claim over the produce of ſome lands, they gained at the ſame time a more extenſive and a ſtronger influence. The clergy on this account, and from their amaſing riches, became formidable to the legiſlature itſelf; and when the cultivators of

lands,

lands, who could not patiently ſubmit to be made ſlaves to the church, by the piety of their predeceſſors, refuſed paying their tythe, the clergy obtained expreſs laws to oblige them to it. After that, the courſe of events gave riſe to another law, which was a conſiderable ſtep towards eſtabliſhing a *univerſal* right of tythes. If, for example, a church was endowed in my neighbourhood, I went to it for convenience, but at my death, giving into the faſhionable folly of leaving the tythe of my eſtate to ſome particular church, and having a partiality for the prieſt of a diſtant church, I add my tythes to the endowments of his benefice. This was frequently the caſe, and appeared ſuch an injuſtice to the prieſt of whom I received my ſpiritual inſtructions, that, on complaint made of it, the Pope, in the reign of that puſillanimous Prince, King John, ordained, that tythes ſhould always be paid to the pariſh prieſt. Hence aroſe new encroachments. Pariſhes became fixed, and the incumbents laid claim to *all* the tythes in their own pariſhes, which claim afterwards was confirmed by law. From this gradation of cauſes and effects, is derived the preſent tyrannical ſtate of the tythe laws.

I ſhall now prove how far this train of cauſes and effects was owing to the tyranny of the prieſts, and the ſuperſtition of the people, by recurring to the early days of chriſtianity in England.

Rapin relates, that " within the firſt 200 years of its eſtabliſhment, religion ſeemed to conſiſt in enriching the Monks, and embracing a monaſtic

life; that Kings, Queens, and Princes, ſtripped themſelves of all wordly grandeur, to paſs their days in a monaſtery;" and notwithſtanding the revenues of the church ought to have conſiſted only in offerings (as is to be ſeen by the Pope's inſtruction to Auſtin, the firſt preacher of the Goſpel here, where he ordains, that one part is for the Biſhop, one to the clergy, another to the poor, and the reſt for the repairs of the church) yet ſuch was the influence of prieſtcraft, that 250 years afterwards, Æthelwulph enacted a law, by which he tythed his whole kingdom to the church, releaſing that tenth part from all taxes and ſervices due to himſelf, and in the charter gives this wiſe reaſon; namely, that it was "for the good of his own ſoul, and of thoſe of all his anceſtors."

In the year 1135, Henry I. founded two Biſhoprics, and four rich Abbies; for, as Rapin ſays, "this method of atoning for offences, was much in vogue in thoſe days, and very eaſy to the rich and powerful." His ſucceſſor, Stephen, ſeemed to be ſubject to the ſame weakneſs. Two of his charters are to be found in Selden. I will tranſlate the preambles as a ſample of the folly of thoſe days, that my countrymen may ſee from what a reſpectable ſource our preſent *Proteſtant* clergy receive their right of tythes. The firſt runs thus: "Stephen, King of England, to the Biſhop of York, &c. greeting. Know ye, becauſe I have given and granted, as a perpetual alms for the ſoul of King Henry, my uncle, and for the good of my own ſoul, and of Queen Matilda's my wife, and of Euſtace, my ſon, and of all

all my other ſons, to God, and the hoſpital of St. Peter of York, all the tythes of the Cuſtoms," &c. &c. The other begins, "Whereas, by the Providence of Divine mercy, we know it to be ordained, and *by the doctrine of the church* preached far and near, which ſounds in the ears of all men, it is declared, that by giving of alms, the chains of ſinners may be looſened, and they may obtain the rewards of heavenly joys, I Stephen, by the grace of God, King, being deſirous of ſharing with thoſe who barter earthly things for heavenly felicity, and moved thereto by the love of God, and for the good of my own ſoul, and of my father's, and my mother's, and the ſouls of all my relations, and my royal anceſtors; to wit, of King William, my grandfather, King Henry, my uncle, and of Robert Mallet, do, *by the advice of my Barons*, give to God, and the holy church of St. Peter, and to the Monks thereof, the tythe of all the lands," and ſo forth. Theſe charters do not ſavour of the ſpirit of Stephen; but if they are not proofs of his ſuperſtition, they are of the tyranny and power of the clergy, ſince Stephen's attempts to humble them, gave them an opportunity to exalt the Mitre above the Crown. So that, to which ever cauſe the tythe laws are to be aſcribed, they are equally improper to be founded on ſuch precedents, and to diſgrace the government of the preſent times.

The ſucceeding reign furniſhes other ſtrong proofs of the arbitrary power of the church, in the affair of Becket; but I ſhall paſs that over, and content myſelf with thoſe enormous inſtances

of it in the reign of John. On a diſpute this Prince had with the Pope, about appointing an Archbiſhop, the Biſhops of London, Ely, and Worceſter, laid the kingdom under an interdict, "Immediately divine ſervice ceaſed in all the churches, and the ſacraments were no longer adminiſtered; the church yards were ſhut up, and the bodies of the dead thrown into ditches like dogs, without any prieſt daring to bury them." From ſuch a beginning, excommunicating the King, and other amazing acts of prieſtly arrogance, are not to be wondered at, when the cloſe of all was the King being obliged to reſign his Crown on two different diſputes, to the Pope's Legate.

From this ſtriking period of eccleſiaſtical dominion, I ſhall paſs on to the Reformation. Henry's diſguſt at the Pope, for oppoſing his marriage with Anne Bullen, concurring with the diſpoſition of the times, produced expreſs laws to aboliſh the Pope's authority in theſe kingdoms. But the King (being ſtill a ſlave to the inſtitutions of the Romiſh church) about the ſame time, confirmed them all by act of parliament. Thus the tythe laws, among other eccleſiaſtical decrees, were grafted upon the laws of the land; and that æra ſtands diſtinguiſhed by this remarkable inconſiſtency, that the ſame Prince who cruſhed the future authority of the Popes, eſtabliſhed the acts of their former power on a firmer baſis than ever.

But it will be ſaid, how happened it, when the Reformation was compleated, that theſe matters were left unfiniſhed? I will juſt explain that, and

and close this article. Henry, though he afterwards suppressed the monasteries, shewed not the least inclination to alter the religion. In the succeeding reign, when the Reformation was really the object, had the leaders in that great business been *sincerely desirous* to abolish tythes, they found themselves obliged to continue and secure them by a new act of parliament, in order to conciliate the minds of the Popish clergy. This was a point of so much consequence, that when the Reformation was perfected by Queen Elizabeth, the reformers obtained the acquiescence of their opponents by it; for out of 9460 beneficed clergymen, 9229 chose to give up their religion, rather than their preferments. Thus it is, that the tythe laws, iniquitous as they are, either from tyranny, superstition or corruption, have survived the tyrants that imposed them.

Stand forth then, ye sons of Aaron, ye divine tythe gatherers, and chuse the ground on which ye will maintain your right of tythes. Have ye followed the example of the Levites, and given up all inheritance in the land, that like them ye should be entitled to the tythe of it? Did the Right Reverend the Bishops, with the assistance of the inferior clergy, bring *us* out of captivity, and settle us in this good land, that we should be your *servants*, and surrender up so large a portion of it to you? Ye cannot plead either the doctrine of Christ, or his apostles, not even the customs of the church in these kingdoms at its first establishment; and I should feel for the respectable body to which ye belong, if ye drew your claim from the

the moſt corrupt periods of the *Romiſh* church. You cannot ſure pretend a right to the pious bequeſts of thoſe neglected ſouls, for which ye never offer up a ſingle prayer. Ye know they were the wages of impoſture, yet ye pride yourſelves on the credit of ſuch an inheritance. Ye cannot plead, that the farmer is under the particular protection of the church, that the ſupport of it ſhould reſt entirely upon his ſhoulders. Do ſuch as you defend him from law-ſuits and proſecutions; or is it at your interceſſion, that the earth brings forth its increaſe, that ſeed time and harveſt ſucceed each other? No, Providence, without your concurrence, ſends rain upon the juſt and upon the unjuſt. Then on what foundation do ye claim a tythe of the produce of the land, which ye have not a power of witholding even from the enemies of our religion?

But ſtill ye have a claim by the *laws of the land*—but do not forget their ſource; compare them with the perfect law of liberty and juſtice; compare your conduct with that of the compounding clergy, who diſdain to avail themſelves of the ſame title, though it would increaſe their livings almoſt threefold; and upon the compariſon, if ye can juſtify yourſelves, and thank God that ye are not as other men are—we will believe you, and thank God too.

# LETTER VI.

HAVING given a ſhort account of the origin and progreſs of tythes, up to their preſent eſtabliſhment among the laws of the land, I will, with the ſame freedom, ſhew how little they deſerve ſuch an honourable ſanction, in a ſtate celebrated for liberty. To do this, I ſhall begin by drawing a line, which ſhall enable the meaneſt capacity to judge of the merits of the point in queſtion.

Laws being intended for the general good, when they *unneceſſarily* oppreſs any particular body of men, and the legiſlature neglects to correct them, they are as much the acts of tyranny, as thoſe of the Great Mogul; therefore, whenever our laws are proved to be *partial*, *oppreſſive*, and *detrimental to the ſtate*, it is a duty we all owe to ourſelves and our country, to take every legal method to obtain their repeal. In this light, let us conſider the tythe laws as the allowed laws of the land.

I have ranked the clergy among the neceſſary appointments of government; as ſuch, government has a right to mark out their ſtation, their offices, and their revenues. So far is requiſite for the public good; but theſe bounds are tranſgreſſed, when agriculture, or any other particular profeſſion, is deſtined to provide for their ſupport,

except

except the ſame rule had been obſerved in other appointments: for example, had the civil liſt been annexed to commerce, the army and navy to manufactures, and ſo of the reſt, the laws being founded on the ſame principle (though an abſurd one) would ſtill have worn the *appearance* of juſtice. But the charges of government are provided for on the moſt equitable plan; an equal tax is levied throughout the kingdom, adminiſtration is ſuppoſed to apply it agreeable to its intention, and the people are not wantonly nor partially oppreſſed. To this fair proceeding, the tythe laws are both an exception and a diſgrace; for landholders are not only obliged to ſupport the church, but pay all other taxes in common with the reſt of their fellow-ſubjects. To explain this by a familiar inſtance: Suppoſe Abel Drugger, a good-natured, credulous fellow, being member of a club, the Preſident perſuades him, that he muſt ſupply the ſociety with tobacco at his own expence, and pay his ſhare of the reckoning beſides. Such a Preſident is evidently a rogue; but if the vintner contributes his liquors, the fruiterer his lemons, and the grocer his ſugar, Abel is not impoſed upon. Apply this to the farmer; he contributes his ſhare to all the expences of government, and fills the parſon's pipe into the bargain. The flagrancy of this injuſtice, furniſhed the clergy of former times with an excuſe for attempting to encreaſe their exactions upon the laity; for we find, in what Selden calls the chiefeſt of the canon laws made for tythes, in the reign of Edward the Firſt, the following

clauſe:

clauſe: " We ordain likewiſe, that perſonal tythes ſhall be paid by *merchants* and *manufacturers*, out of the profits of their trade. The ſame by carpenters, ſmiths, bricklayers, and plaiſterers, and other men that work for wages; viz. they ſhall pay the tenth part of their wages, unleſs the workmen themſelves will contribute ſomething to the repairs of the church, and provided the rector pleaſes to accept of it." In conformity to this, it was enacted in 2 and 3 of Edward the Sixth, " that perſonal tythes of gain, by merchandize and artifice, in ſuch places as within forty years preceding had been accuſtomably uſed to be paid, are commanded to be paid yearly, at or before Eaſter." Theſe laws are in ſome places annulled, as in London, &c. and in others grown into diſuſe. But what a delectable profeſſion would preaching and praying be, if theſe goodly ordinances were religiouſly and univerſally obeyed, if the Eaſt-India merchants, and the Weſt-India planters, were to pay a tenth of their rupees and rum puncheons to the Church? And indeed a man who gets three or four thouſand a year, can much better afford to give a quarter of it to this purpoſe, than a poor wretch who calls himſelf a farmer, and clears thirty pounds a year, can ſpare nine. I will maintain, that the moſt opulent trader, if he has no landed eſtate, ſeldom pays ſo much as nine pounds. His donations are *voluntary*, and if he gives five guineas, he is generous. But the poor farmer, who rents thirty pounds a year, muſt pay nine *by law*; for if the produce yields him three rents, the tythe is juſt that ſum;

ſo that allowing one rent for the landlord, one for labour, and one clear, he pays *more than a quarter of his profits to the parſon.* Deduct too the town charges, which Mr. Young reckons at four ſhillings in the pound, and you take away juſt *half his profit.* How then can this uſeful, but oppreſſed fellow-ſubject, ſupport his wife and children? Well may our beſt writers on huſbandry ſay, that the ſituation of ſuch a man is more deplorable, than that of a day labourer. Let not therefore, the righteouſneſs of our clergy plead in favour of laws ſo infamouſly oppreſſive as theſe; nor the corrupt ſtateſman dare to produce ſhallow arguments from cuſtom, in oppoſition to *a claim of juſtice, from objects ſo highly worthy of relief.*

If any thing can be added to the miſery of ſuch men, it is the dread of proſecution from rapacious tythe gatherers. Let any one turn to the article "tythe," in any of our law collections, and ſee what innumerable cauſes of diſpute, are to be found on points, in which the farmer is utterly ignorant; and it is too often found, that the clergy who intereſt themſelves in ſuch paltry concerns as pigs and poultry, butter and eggs, are at leaſt as litigious as the farmer is fraudulent. The vicar may be needy, ſo may the farmer; but it can ſcarcely be called fraud in the latter, rather *the ſtrugglings of a ſlave, to avoid the iron rod of tyranny.* Sure, from *reaſons of ſtate*, the legiſlature ought to interfere, and prevent a reſpectble character from ſinking into contempt, and a valuable

luable member of the community from being worried by the law, as well as the church.

The great officers of the ſtate, and of the law, the army, the navy, have no claim on individuals, for *their* ſubſiſtence; conſequently, there are no grounds of contention between them and the people. It is rather hard upon the clergy, that they alone who are ordained to preach peace and good will towards men, ſhould be in an eternal ſtate of warfare with their pariſhoners, and for temporal things too (frequently ſuperfluities) which they affect to deſpiſe. If the ſoldiers were by the ſame rule allowed to make their quarters good in all parts of the kingdom, it would juſtly be deemed an intolerable grievance, becauſe it would fall only on particular perſons. The clergy do it, and we bear with it. Their predeceſſors have, by *many iniquitous arts*, catered *for themſelves*, and faſtened upon the tenth of all the farmer's expences, his labour, and his crop. If it is not paid, the power of the *laws* is exerted to oblige him. Theſe are more formidable than a drawn ſword, which he may wreſt out of the hands of a *military maroder*, and defend his property; but from the laws there is no eſcaping; beſides, the eccleſiaſtical courts are permitted to excommunicate him. In this caſe, a man's wife may be taken from him, and he cannot ſue to recover her. This ſure is the moſt barefaced tyranny; it is being both judge and executioner in their own cauſe. Who can ſecure a refractory farmer from theſe effects of *pious vengeance*, when once

it is thoroughly rouſed? *Si tantæ animis cæleſtibus ræ*

And here I cannot help putting in a few words to my fellow-labourers, the Anti-tythe-in-kind club, eſtabliſhed at *Rye*. They profeſs, in their advertiſement, that they meet to conſider of the *manner of ſetting out* their tythe in oppoſition to the neighbouring clergy. I do not know the nature of their grievances; but oppoſition to the clergy, while they have the law on their ſide, is but kicking againſt the pricks; they ſhould lay the axe *to the root of the tree*, and endeavour, by petition, to *remove the law:* Each member ſhould ſtand forth in that character ſo beautifully deſcribed by Gray,

A village Hampden, that with dauntleſs breaſt
The little tyrant of his fields withſtood;

which cannot be done ſo effectually as by inviting other counties to correſpond with them. This will give a uniformity and a weight to their meaſures; for, however powerful the clergy are, the law of *tythes in kind* ſtands on ſuch a rotten foundation, unpropped by *juſtice*, *humanity*, *or good policy*, that the crazy fabric muſt totter with the firſt breath of a debate in parliament.

But to return: The tythe-laws operate greatly to the prejudice of ſeveral important articles of cultivation. Hops, flax, hemp, and madder, are raiſed at a vaſt expence. The more money the farmer lays out, the greater the profit of the parſon. The firſt article "is reckoned in moſt parts of the kingdom to pay the church ten ſhillings

lings on every acre when the landlord gets but twenty." On the ſecond, *Voltaire*, ſpeaking of the inequitable advantages the manufacturer has over the landholder in his contributions to the church, obſerves, " Where the farmer clears fifty pounds for raiſing flax, the mannfacturer of fine lace may get five thouſand; the one is tythed, the other not."* Thus the *fountain* of this beneficial trade is grievouſly taxed, while the *ſtream* may extend itſelf, and rowl on in all its pride, without any other than a voluntary tribute. As to madder, the author of The Tour through Great Britain, aſſerts, " It was formerly cultivated in many parts of England, but diſcontinued on account of the many diſputes with the clergy about tythes; ſo that when the tythe was determined to be vicarial, it was totally neglected, and our neighbours, the Dutch, availed themſelves of it; and have, for many years paſt, received between one and two hundred thouſand pounds annually for this dye."

With regard to merchants, manufacturers, and handicrafts, being exempted from an equal ſhare of contribution to the church, it is certainly a moſt ſhameful partiality. They do not even furniſh the parſon with neceſſaries in their trade: On the contrary, he is authoriſed by the laws to oppreſs the *farmer*; and having obtained more pro-

* This is a quota ion from memory, out of the *Queſtions ſur L'Encyclopædie*, ſo that the ſums mentioned in French livres, are rather imitated than tranſlated.

proviſion than was requiſite for his family, inſtead of diſtributing the overplus to the poor, carries it to market, and pays the ſhop-keeper *with the farmer's money*. I appeal to facts if this picture is in the leaſt exaggerated.

There was undoubtedly a policy in the original founders of tythes, in calling them the *poor's patrimony*; for by eſtabliſhing the cuſtom of paying them in kind, they were enabled to relieve the neceſſitous, and acquire larger contributions by the good uſes they were ſeen to apply them to. That they intended to obtain this good opinion, at leaſt, is evident by the canon of the council of Nantz, by which it was ordered, that "tythes were to be uſed *non pro ſuis, ſed quaſi commendatis*;" not for themſelves, but in truſt. Accordingly, "till Queen Elizabeth's time, we had no ſettled laws for the benefit of the poor; for our abbies and monaſteries, aſſiſted by the benevolence and hoſpitality of lords of manors, till the time of the Reformation, were a ſufficient proviſion for the poor of this kingdom." And it appears likewiſe by the canon quoted in the beginning of this letter, and by the Pope's inſtructions to Auſtin, in my laſt, that *the very repairs of the church* were originally defrayed *by the clergy*. Had Chriſt's injunction, "take neither ſcrip nor purſe," been obeyed by his followers, a mercenary injuſtice would never have diſgraced their miniſtry. Tythes in kind, in the full ſimplicity of their primitive intention, would have furniſhed every neceſſary of life in abundance, and a large overplus had remained for the benefit of the poor;

but

but by the liberty of converting them into money, ſome unworthy members of the church became as rapacious, as proud, and as ambitious as the laity.

Since then it is notorious, that the laws of tythes in kind bear hard upon *one* particular body of men, to the exemption *of all others*; (for the petty donations of houſholders are not worth mentioning) ſince they are not only *partially* impoſed, but *grievouſly* felt; ſince they involve the farmer in *law ſuits*, and violate *even his liberty* as an Engliſhman; ſince they *reſtrain agriculture, and injure the commercial intereſts* of this kingdom; ſince they create hatred, fraud, ſtrife, and jealouſy between *the paſtor and his flock*; ſince they, in their preſent ſtate, are *an abuſe of their orginal intention*, and are the greateſt ſupport of the *Nullum Tempus Law*, which exalts the clergy *above the Sovereign*;—need it be added, as an incentive to their repeal, that other nations, leſs the ſeat of liberty and good ſenſe than England is, have adopted the meaſure long ago? Selden ſays, "he never met with any canon-law of all the Eaſtern church that ever commanded any thing touching tythes; and that Antoninus expreſsly remembers the non-payment of them in thoſe religious communities as a thing not cenſured to be againſt God's law." In more modern times, when the reformation from Popery took place in other nations, an abolition of the tythes went hand in hand; ſo that at preſent, in *Sweden*, *Norway*, *Denmark*, in half of *Germany*, in *Holland*, in *Switzerland*, the clergy are paid *out of the public treaſury*. "The preſent Em-

preſs

preſs of *Ruſſia* too, when ſhe ſet about reforming that vaſt empire, firſt releaſed her people from all ſlaviſh dependance on herſelf, and then delivered them from the power of the church, and ordered its revenues to proceed *from the coffers of the ſtate.*" Even France and Italy, though ſtill in the ſhackles of Popery, are not ſo aggrieved by this cuſtom as we are; for according to Selden, "*England pays more in tythes than thoſe two kingdoms put together.*"

Let us then, from motives of liberty, juſtice, and policy, root out ſuch a corruption in our laws, and bluſh that we have ſo long been guilty of ſo groſs a ſoleciſm in government, as to deny abſolute power to a King, yet ſuffer ſo large a portion of it in a *Pariſh Rector.*

LET-

## LETTER VII.

WHEN I firſt took up the pen on the ſubject of tythes, I determined not to ſet my foot beyond the limits of conſtitutional principles, and hoped, by confining myſelf to this ground, I ſhould avoid the riſk of being bewildered in the mazes of law: But as great ſtreſs has been laid upon eccleſiaſtical *property*, I am under a neceſſity of advancing further than I intended: Yet, inſtead of courſing the wriggling polluted ſtream of ſophiſticated juſtice, and vainly imagining, with eyes unuſed to ſuch reſearches, that I ſee to the bottom of it, I ſhall recur to the pure fountain of natural equity, and by keeping within my depth, ſhall, with more ſafety, endeavour to point out the difference between clerical and laical property.

To raiſe my ſubject from the leaſt exceptionable foundation, I will ſuppoſe our clergy's right of tythes as ſolid, to all intents and pupoſes, as that of the Levites. The Levites were poſſeſſed of tythes on the moſt equitable title; they paid a price for them, for they made a ſurrender of their own portion, a twelfth of all the land, and the conditions were aſſented to by the other eleven tribes. But let us ſuppoſe, that ſome centuries after, the deſcendants of theſe tribes had remonſtrated to the Levites to this effect: "Our fa-

thers have by the tythe law entailed oppreſſion and ſlavery upon their poſterity; the huſbandmen are diſcontented, they murmur at and deſpiſe their teachers, they deteſt your claims; religion begins to loſe its influence, and even agriculture is diſcouraged by the burthen of your exactions. Theſe are points of ſo much conſequence, that we are under the neceſſity of reſtoring to you your original right, and propoſe rewarding you for your ſervices by ſome other mode of compenſation." Had ſuch an event taken place, and the tribes juſtified themſelves on theſe principles, neither the moſt abandoned ſtate craft, nor all the ſubtlety that ever was inſtilled into the whole order of Melchiſedeck, or picked up at the foot of Gamaliel, could have afforded an honourable plea of oppoſition.

The Levites portion, as a tribe, was an inviolable original right; the ſpiritual revenue which they received, was property of another nature; it was eſtabliſhed indeed, but it was literally no more than the wages of their office, and ſubject, as all wages muſt be, to the will of thoſe who pay them. While an old contract continues between maſter and ſervant, the former is a tyrant and a robber that withholds his hire; but if the maſter chuſes to introduce new regulations, the ſervant muſt abide by it, or quit his ſervice; his Lord treats him with no injuſtice, but acts only agreeable to the power his ſituation has given him.

But the Levites would ſay, "We hold our tythes on the ſanction of general compact, that ſuch obligations are ſacred in their nature, that

our

our twelfth portion, as a tribe, which you offer to reſtore to us, though planted with the fig-tree, the olive, and the vine, is of much leſs value than that which you take from us; at preſent we are poſſeſſed of a tenth, and not only a tenth of the land, but a tenth of the labour and riches neceſſary to its cultivation." To this the rulers of the people might reply, "Poſterity is not to be enſlaved, and the public good ſubverted, by the eccleſiaſtical ordinances of former ages, or the miſguided acquieſcence of ignorance and neceſſity. Ye are bad citizens, and unworthy the ſacred office ye fill, ſince with all that affected ſanctity of character, ye ſet up your own private intereſts, in oppoſition to the welfare of the people. Ye are the ſervants of the ſtate, and muſt no longer be the lords of it; we will aſſign you revenues adequate to your ſervices; we will reſtore to you your juſt rights, the Levites portion; but if ye are not contented with this, we will withdraw thoſe powers which have enabled you to levy your taxations, and in ſo doing we commit no violence on you, but prevent your committing it on others."

If the concluſions to be drawn from this imaginary ſketch of the fate of the Jewiſh prieſthood, are founded on natural equity, and if it will be allowed, that in proportion as the dark ages of bigotry and impoſture, are ſucceeded by the liberal ideas of more enlightened times, the dominion of the church muſt be abſorbed in the power of the ſtate; it remains to examine, whether the Proteſtant clergy poſſeſs rights and privileges ſo

much ſuperior to thoſe of the Levites, as ought to ſecure them from all interference of government on the ſcore of clerical property.

The Pope among the Chriſtians, as well as Moſes among the Jews, had acquired the ſupreme power over all people within the pale of his own church, and, like Moſes, he exerted it in favour of the prieſthood, and eſtabliſhed, though not with ſo good a title, as large a fund for their proviſion. But what are the deductions that a *Proteſtant tythe-gatherer* can draw from theſe two facts? By the ſame church logic by which he claims the tythes of this kingdom, he is equally entitled to the flints of Kadeſh Barnea; for the nonſenſical cant the clergy make uſe of about the pious donations of our forefathers, is falſe in its premiſes. Thoſe grants were made by ſuperſtitious, well-meaning people, to Popiſh prieſts. *Be it remembered*, they were made to *Popiſh prieſts* for the good of the ſouls of the granters, and ſuch of their relations as they choſe to include in theſe acts of grace. The power of the times wreſted them from theſe purpoſes, and beſtowed them where they now remain. But if the doctrine of purgatory ſhould prove true, and a hearing be appointed to ſettle the diſputes between the Romiſh and Reformed churches, the ſouls that ſhall have continued ſo long in limbo, may file a tremendous bill of complaints for breach of contract, unjuſt detention of property, and wrongs ſuſtained; ſo that our Proteſtant clergy would have much to anſwer for.

It

It follows then, that if tythes were even willingly and conſcientiouſly paid up to the time of the Reformation, a law to oblige the payment of them into other hands, and for other purpoſes than the donors intended, was an act of injuſtice and arbitrary power; yet from this, and no better title, do the clergy deduce their's. They may quote old grants, charters, and teſtaments, but they cannot prove themſelves to be the perſons deſcribed. Would a court of equity decree in their favour, if the laws had not put them in poſſeſſion? The fact is, the legiſlature at the Reformation, inſtead of remitting this bounty into the hands of thoſe that paid it, availed itſelf of the cuſtom, and eſtabliſhed it as a revenue for the benefit of the new Miniſtry.

After this juſt expoſition of the caſe, I hope to hear no more of the pious donations of our forefathers on the ſubject of tythes. Such a plea comes with as much propriety from the mouths of the Proteſtant clergy, as if, in conſequence of the conqueſt of China, and the propagation of Chriſtianity there, they were to lay claim to the temples, which the piety of the Mandarines dedicate to the manes of their anceſtors.

The whole affair then is reduced to the title the clergy derive from the laws of the land; it is a title, and a ſufficient one for their preſent ſecurity; but they will give me leave to evince the dependency of that title on the will of government, by the following illuſtrations.

In

In Charles the First's time, if Cromwell's army, while they were maſters of the Parliament, had availed themſelves of their power, and had obtained a ſolemn act of the legiſlature, that the male deſcendants of the officers and ſoldiers ſhall ſeverally inherit the profeſſion of their fathers; that the ſons of the officers ſhall be born to commiſſions, and receive the pay of Enſigns from the day of their birth; and thoſe of the ſoldiers, the rank and pay of private men; and if ſo abſurd a law, ſo wrongfully obtained, had, through the fear or ſupineneſs of government, ſubſiſted to this day, the army could have pleaded as good a legal right to ſuch an inheritance, and as honeſtly founded, as the preſent claims of the Church. But though while this military law continued in force, Juſtice herſelf muſt be an advocate in favour of any individual whoſe pay was arbitrarily witheld, yet, if the nation found it neceſſary to repeal the law, or, by exerting the authority of a maſter over his ſervants, ſhould diſband the whole army, I preſume the moſt hackneyed quibbler would bluſh to inſiſt on the neceſſity of obtaining their concurrence, or diſpute the legiſlative authority, under that fallacious clerical plea, "that the inheritance aſſigned them by law, ought to be as ſacred from violation, as the poſſeſſion of a landed eſtate."

Again: Suppoſe Henry VIII. had applied the tythes of the preſent lay impropriators, to the payment of the army, it would be abſurd in the military of the preſent age, to inſiſt that their property in thoſe tythes ought to be as inviolable, as

the

the right of a landholder to his eſtate. It is evident, that government beſtowing and intending thoſe tythes as their pay, the army muſt acknowledge their tenure to be ſubject to the ſame authority; as to hereditary right, the church and the army would ſtand on the ſame ground: therefore, as neither had any original claim, it follows, that the power which gave the tythes, might have given them to any other ſet of men; or (which brings it to the point in queſtion) might have ſuffered them to return to the owner of the land, and have rewarded their ſervices out of the public treaſury.

It may be ſaid, Henry VIII. did *not* ſuffer the tythes to revert to the owners of the other nine parts: he ſettled them upon the church, and the gift has been confirmed by various acts of parliament; therefore their title is as ſolid as that of the lay impropriators. This too I deny: for the tythes given to the lay impropriators, have been many times bought and ſold, are hereditable, and are ſecurely ſheltered among the other inviolable property of the ſubject: but the church tythes are ſtill in the hands of government, not delivered up to the diſpoſal of any particular rector, or of the clergy in general; otherwiſe an incumbent might bequeath his living to his ſon, or the clergy, in convocation, might alter the preſent ſyſtem of their revenues, juſt as the reigning principle, paſſion, or intereſt ſhould dictate.

But an alteration in the church revenues, by dividing the larger livings to increaſe the incomes of the ſmaller, might be effected by the concurrence of patrons with government; the clergy's con-

concurrence with either, *ſingly*, would not be ſufficient for this purpoſe; much leſs could they do it of themſelves; neither ought their negative to be admitted; * ſince the point to be debated, would be, how far the abſolute property of the laity ſhall be applied to the ſupport of the church. The clergy are only freeholders by courteſy; to admit them to certain privileges of convenience, but to none of ſuch extent of power as might render them formidable to the ſtate. Thus the Biſhops are Peers by courteſy, but their negative is not admitted againſt the concurrent voice of the temporal Lords.—Property, thus reſtricted, is little better than a ſhadow.

The true definition of Property, is a right which any man has to lands and tenements, independent of the will of another. What becomes of the property of the church, when tried by this rule? Can a rector obtain a living without preſentation? Or, when he has obtained it, can he confer the nature of property upon it? Can he ſell it? Can he give it away or exchange it? Is not the value of it dependent on the influence of local cuſtom?. If the duty of it is deſerted, can the tythe be demanded? If the ſoil is run to waſte in the abſence of the owner, is not the rector's property a mere non-entity? While lay property, in this free

* The only two points inſiſted upon by the gentleman, to whom this letter is a reply, were that the property of tythes was as inviolable as any other property, and in conſequence that no reformation, in that reſpect, could take place, without the clergy's conſent.

free country, is a methamatical point which cannot be annihilated, and from which, as a center, all the lines of the conſtitution diverge.

It is well known that public worſhip is regulated by law, conſequently thoſe who officiate in it, are ſubject to whatever reformation the law may introduce. Like all other officers of government, the clergy are under the ſupremacy of the King, and of courſe under the authority of the legiſlative power. By the King's commiſſion *alone*, a Biſhop may be deprived. The inferior clergy may ſuffer deprivation on many accounts, ſuch as neglect of duty, ſimony, drunkenneſs, fornication, hereſy, ſchiſm, want of learning, diſobedience to the ordinary, non-conformity to the canons, &c. Now, I beg leave to aſk thoſe clergymen, who inſiſt that eccleſiaſtical property is as ſolid as lay property, whether theſe charges, which deprive a clerk of his benefice, would in the leaſt affect his paternal eſtate?

Since then the power of government over the clergy is as demonſtrable as its authority over the army; and their revenues as ſubject to regulation as military pay, I will refer them to the caſe of the Levites at the beginning of my letter, and ſubmit to the candour and uprightneſs af their profeſſion, whether they can produce arguments, founded in truth and juſtice, in oppoſition to a neceſſary and reaſonable petition, for the abolition of *tythes in kind*.

I have ſhewn that the rights of lay impropriators ſtand on a much ſurer ground; and when they do not take tythe in kind, there is little to be ſaid

againſt them. But, impregnable as they ſeem to be, I will venture to ſay, that government could enforce them to accept of a reaſonable compenſation, in lieu of their right, with as much eaſe as it can oblige any ſubject to ſell, for *a valuable conſideration*, an abſolute *freehold*, if, by its ſituation, it is known to be *a public nuiſance*.

Thus I think I have given a general anſwer to the arguments upon the ſubject of property. I ſhall only add, that, ſince this gentleman is ſo accurate in his diſtinctions, I wiſh, in the midſt of his triumph about laws made in times of Popery, he had diſtinguiſhed between thoſe enacted for civil government, and thoſe calculated for eccleſiaſtical purpoſes.* And as he concludes with a *ſerious queſtion,—whether the prevailing ſentiment of all nations, that the tenth of their goods ſhould be devoted to the Gods*, is not an argument in favour of tythes?—I ſhall refer him to that beautiful reproof of the Pſalmiſt, which he puts into the mouth of the Creator: "If I am hungry, I will not tell thee; for all the beaſts of the foreſt are mine, and ſo are the cattle upon a thouſand hills."

---

* It was inſiſted on, that the ſame plea which is urged againſt as *a Popiſh law*, would hold good againſt *all* laws made before the Reformation.

LET-

# LETTER VIII.

I HOPE by this time that the landholders, who have followed me through the courſe of this enquiry into the nature of tythes, are convinced that they do not by any means deſerve the reſpect which, by age and preſcription, they have acquired. The pretence of divine right is too ridiculous to attend to. The only point which demands the conſideration of an honeſt man, is the claim of property. This too I have expoſed the fallacy of, by ſhewing, that the church revenues could juſtly be called property, no longer than while they were held under the grants and teſtaments of the donors before the reformation; but afterwards, what had been property, became an arbitrary appointment of the legiſlature, to be continued to the miniſters of the new eſtabliſhed church, and their ſucceſſors, as *the wages of their function.*

On this ground then the cauſe reſts. The preſent landholders, who look up to the legiſlature as ſupreme in all matters eccleſiaſtical and civil, and who cannot in their conſciences conſider the preſent clergy as the right heirs to the pious donations of their Popiſh forefathers, will naturally draw theſe two inferences: 1ſt, that the preſent clergy are appointed to their reſpective benefices *by government*, in ſuch a manner as is directed and eſtabliſhed by law. 2dly, that their revenues

are not an inheritance, but intended as a ſtipendiary conſideration for their ſervices.

It is unneceſſary to prove the truth of the firſt inference, ſince the greateſt ſtickler for eccleſiaſtical property cannot produce an inſtance of a clergyman ſucceeding to a benefice by any claim, merit, or induſtry of his own, without the patronage and appointment of a ſuperior.

As government then has regulated the method of their appointment, ſo has it allotted them a revenue to be levied on the property of the ſubject. But a revenue to be levied on the property of the ſubject, under the authority of government, is *a tax*; ſince then the tythe is but another word for tax, it becomes an object of general concern, and the iniquity of it may be demonſtrated on the moſt certain principles.

The ſpirit of an equal taxation is, " that every member of ſociety ſhall contribute to the charges of government in proportion to his ability." Accordingly, there is not a neceſſary of life, nor an article of luxury, either the product of our own country, or imported from abroad, but what is taxed in ſome ſhape or other. Hence it is evident, that either the neceſſity or luxury of every individual, leading him to the conſumption of various commodities, obliges him to tax himſelf in proportion to his way of living; and it is likewiſe clear, that if the neceſſaries are leſs taxed than the luxuries of life, no mode of contribution to the exigencies of government can be more equitable.

Thus

Thus far then we move on the ſquare. Theſe are the ſupplies which form the public treaſury; and from this ſource all the ſervants of the community, from the King to the private ſoldier, are intended to be provided for. But there is one conſtitutional appointment for which government has made no proviſion; I mean the Clergy. They are a numerous and expenſive body to maintain in that reſpect which is due to their character. Then what has government done to remedy this omiſſion? It has bid them go forth among the huſbandmen, and take a tenth of the fruits of all their induſtry. Whether they be rich or poor, the produce of every tenth acre ſhall be the prieſts, and every tenth labourer ſhall be his ſlave.

We may therefore call this an extra conſtitutional tax, of a moſt tyrannical nature, impoſed upon the landholders *over and above what they pay in common with their fellow ſubjects.* We will now examine how far this agrees with the definition of an equal taxation, *even among themſelves.*

To bring it to the principles of an equal taxation, it would be neceſſary that every landholder ſhould contribute to the ſupport of the church according to his ability. On the contrary, there re many whole manors abſolutely tythe free. here is a modus by law, by cuſtom, and preſcption. Every compoſition made before the thteenth of Elizabeth, is a legal exemption from payent of tythes for ever. A modus by cuſtom is fowhole pariſhes; by preſcription, for ſome par-

particular houſe or farm. Yet theſe exemptions will not be found to be authoriſed in theſe days, in conſideration of the poverty of the parties relieved, or for any reaſon of benefit to the community, but ſeem only calculated to keep up a uniformity in the tythe laws, which being abſurd in a general view, are equally ſo in all their parts.

The indigent ſituation of individuals, or ſome motive of public expediency, are the only foundation of exemption from taxes. If privileges and commutations were allowed of, the partiality of thoſe in power would be a ſource of infinite injuſtice. Compare the practice of decimation with the equitable plan of the window tax, which includes every houſe in the kingdom. The meaneſt pays but three ſhillings, windows included; for ſeven windows, the addition of twopence each; for all above twenty-four, two ſhillings each. This is proportioning the levies to the abilities of the people. But by the tythe laws, a farm of ten acres muſt give up a tenth of its produce, while one of a thouſand is not obliged to do more. So that, while the landholders in general are unfairly taxed, the little farmers have the additional grievance of being rated to their full tenth, tho' their ſituation is more to be commiſerated in many inſtances than a day labourer.

But it may be ſaid, "farmers are not the only conſumers of the fruits of the ground; conſequently, whatever taxes are impoſed on their commodities, are ultimately paid by the public."

Even in this light the tythe laws will be found equally

equally grievous and oppreſſive. Suppoſing a hundred acres for which the farmer pays 100l. per ann. rent, produces wheat which will fetch (at a medium of three quarters per acre) the even ſum of ſix hundred pounds, if the land tax and church tax are included in it, upon the principle of throwing them on the conſumer, the firſt being twenty, and the latter ſixty pounds, it is evident that the public will pay *one ſeventh part extraordinary upon this account.* Now, is it not a grievous thing, that a poor man, when he buys ſeven-pennyworth of bread, ſhould pay one penny in tax, whereof only one farthing goes to the ſtate, and the other three ſolely to the church! The ſame truth may be extended to butchers meat, cheeſe, butter, &c. This is contrary to the intentions of the legiſlature, whoſe chief care is to avoid taxing proviſions; well knowing that the poor are unavoidably affected by other taxes, which, however diſtant, like circles in the water, extend themſelves by degrees over the whole ſurface.

I now leave the clergy to chuſe the alternative, whether the injuſtice of this tax ſhall oppreſs the farmer at the rate of ſixty pounds in ſix hundred, or grind the face of the poor, by raiſing three-farthings in ſeven-pence out of their common ſuſtenance, which is as much as is paid by the firſt nobleman in the kingdom. The legiſlature indeed can ſtep in between the price of corn and the hardſhips of the poor, by allowing an importation: but agriculture is ſo beſet by the progreſſive

greſſive dearneſs of manufactures, the exorbitancy of the tythe laws, and the raiſing of the rents, *according to Mr. Young's* * *plan*, that if to theſe is ſuperadded a too frequent importation, it muſt, by the irreſiſtable preſſure of ſuch mighty oppoſites, inevitably be ruined. The bad effects of a propelling power on one hand, and a reſtraining power on the other, when not properly regulated, are univerſally felt both in nature and in politics. The poor themſelves are the victims of them in *the riſe of proviſions, and the limitation of their wages*. The cup of *Tantalus* may be filled to the brim, but if it is not lowered to the lips, or the lips raiſed to the cup, the contents are equally unattainable. It is juſt as clear, that land will produce no more than common induſtry can effect. Expenſive and philoſophical improvements are not within the reach of common men, and on theſe do we depend for the neceſſaries of life. If great demands are made on the land, either by the landlord or the church, the common farmer muſt relieve himſelf by proportioning the price of proviſions to that of manufactures, which, when the kingdom is made ſenſible

* It is to be wiſhed this gentleman would re-conſider this ſubject, for the landed intereſt are too ready to raiſe their rent without the encouragement of a popular writer. Uncommon effects are not to be produced but by uncommon agents. An abler head and a ſtronger purſe, will not attend the riſe of rents; but neceſſity will oftener oblige a tenant to injure an eſtate, than improve it.

ſible of by internal convulſions, the legiſlature only can apply the remedy. †

---

† The calamities attendant upon the progreſſive dearneſs of proviſions, are become the ſubject of general apprehenſion. One cauſe of this ſcarcity ſeems to me reducible to a demonſtration. In a nation, for example, conſiſting of people whoſe principal occupation is huſbandry, if there is land enough there can be no ſcarcity of bread corn; but if one half of them turn to pleaſure, commerce, manufacturers, &c. it is evident the ſame quantity of corn cannot be raiſed by the other half; yet the whole number muſt ſtill be fed. But let it be granted, that while the whole nation applied to huſbandry, there was an overplus of corn for their neighbours, yet the deſertion of one half muſt reduce this overplus nearer to a bare ſufficiency; and when the idle and commercial part diminiſh the quantity of bread corn ſtill more, by obliging agriculture to provide for various articles of luxury, ſuch as horſes, calves, lambs, ſtarch, diſtilled ſpirits, &c. a perpetual ſcarcity will take place, and yet none of the be land neglected, but only miſapplied. If theſe deductions are as uncontrovertible as they appear to be, and at the ſame time not unapplicable to this nation; the only permanent remedy that offers itſelf, is to convert the remaining uncultivated lands into tillage, by diſtributing them among the ſupernumeraries of every profeſſion, and even among foreigners: by this means, new ſtores of proviſion will be opened, which could not be done but by furniſhing an increaſe of huſbandmen: at the ſame time, that the preſent ſtores will be more ſufficient when the train of luxury and idleneſs is ſo conſiderably reduced. Thus plenty and population would revive, without committing violence on public liberty; our goals would not be crouded with criminals, nor our cities and towns enlarged at the expence of the country; emigrations would be prevented by *planting a colony at home*; and, upon the whole, the conſtitution of *Old* England, would be ſet a going again, for another millennium. If part of the Aſiatick wealth was employed to this purpoſe, it would prove of real ſervice to this kingdom, inſtead of contributing to its deſtruction, as evidently as the mines of America to that of Old Spain.

# LETTER IX.

I CANNOT help reflecting, with ſome degree of indignation, on the preſumption of *ſome* clergymen, who, even in theſe days, dare to advance ſuch arguments in favour of tythes, as are the cleareſt proofs (not of the juſtice of what they plead for) but of the contempt in which they hold the underſtandings of the laity, and of the ſame diſpoſition to tyranny, which diſgraced the worſt of their predeceſſors. One would think, that men of cultivated talents, and of profeſſed piety, ſhould ſcorn to proſtitute their characters in defence of a falſhood, where their only inducement is a private temporal advantage; and where they muſt be ſenſible, that a practice ſo repugnant to thoſe precepts of truth and ſelf-denial, which they would inculcate from the pulpit, muſt greatly abate that love and reſpect for themſelves, which it is their intereſt to improve; yet I dare not doubt, but there are many who will diſtinguiſh themſelves in ſupport of the real dignity of the church, an integrity of character; who will acknowledge, that their revenues are but the wages of their miniſtry, and diſclaiming all other title but that of the laws, will readily ſubmit to whatever new regulations the legiſlature ſhall adopt, as moſt conducive to the general good.

When

When I hear a clergyman affect patriotism, I always contrive to turn the converſation upon tythes; and if he acquits himſelf in the ſame liberal manner on that ſubject, as upon politics, I honour him for his ſincerity: But, unfortunately, too many of thoſe gentlemen (though perfect maſters of their own language) do not carry their ideas of patriotiſm to that large extent which the word imports; they confine it entirely to politics, and think that its moſt ſalutary exertions ſhould never be employed againſt eccleſiaſtical fraud. In that view patriotiſm becomes ſacrilege, and they ſtrain every engine of prieſtcraft to perſuade the ignorant and ſuperſtitious, that religion herſelf is in danger, if an attempt ſhould be made to authoriſe a pariſhioner to pay his rector in money, inſtead of a baſket of eggs.

To prevent the effects of impoſture on the minds of the farmers, is a neceſſary part of my plan. Not only illiterate people, but thoſe of a liberal education, are too often miſled by the bold aſſertions of ſuch men, who are in any degree reſpectable by their profeſſion or their learning. It was this indolent, confidential diſpoſition, or the force of corruption, that prevailed over the Iriſh parliament, when they yielded to the reaſons drawn up by *Swift*, againſt the *bill for ſettling the tythe of flax, &c. by a modus.* This little tract is extant among his works; and it is there ſaid, that the bill was dropped in conſequence of the arguments he produced againſt it. As his ſuperior abilities are univerſally acknowledged, and the clergy of thoſe days pitched upon him as their

champion, I may fairly preſume, that our's would be content to truſt the ſame cauſe in the ſame hands, ſo that to review ſuch points in it, as are applicable to the tythe in general, will be anticipating the the principal objections which may now be made to a ſimilar reformation.

The Dean ſays, " it is hard that agriculture " cannot be encouraged, but at the expence of " the clergy." This complaint of his is artful and diſingenuous; for he calls a redreſs from tythe, " a load laid upon the ſhoulders of the " clergy," inſtead of defining it, a load taken off the ſhoulders of the laity, which the clergy have impoſed. The public is too juſt, to require agriculture to be encouraged at the expence of the clergy; but it is no injuſtice, if tythes operate as a *diſcouragement*, that they ſhould be aboliſhed, and ſome leſs pernicious method of ſupporting the church, ſubſtituted in their room. He lays a great ſtreſs on the *antiquity* of the title which every clergyman has to his living. I wonder when this *antient title* bears date, whether at the birth of the young rector, or at his induction to the benefice, or at the time the Popiſh prieſts were ouſted of their livings by the legiſlative power? and yet he had the modeſty to compare it with the hereditary rights of any land-owner in the kingdom.

" To queſtion the power of Parliament in re- " ducing the tythe," is the ſhorteſt way to eſtabliſh that of the church, provided a Parliament can be found weak or corrupt enough to ſuffer ſuch an attack upon their dignity. But *Swift*

was

was too well acquainted with the nature of government, and with what had already been done, to think as he wrote, though he choſe to ſtake his own reputation as an honeſt advocate, rather than acknowledge a power ſo dangerous to the intereſts of his own cloth.

" The impoſſibility of a rector's cheating a " farmer," is a ſtrange plea for the continuance of tythes, becauſe (adds the Dean) " the utmoſt " that can be demanded, is to have the tythe " fairly laid out." Alas! this is the very grievance that requires redreſs; for what the Dean looks upon as the *ſummum jus* of the rector, is the *ſumma injuria* of the farmer. But ſo conſcious was he of the exorbitancy of this tax, that he calculates the tythe of a rental of two millions, at only *two* hundred thouſand pounds; when, ſuppoſing the land to produce only treble the rent, the tythe is *ſix* hundred thouſand.

It is very true, that " every determinate ſum " in lieu of a tenth of the produce, muſt, in proceſs of time, ſink by the neceſſary fall attending " the value of money;" but all officers under the government may make the ſame plea, to have their ſalaries converted into a tythe. Thoſe of the army, who, by their profeſſion, are entitled to mix in the moſt ſplendid aſſemblies and are by many concurrent circumſtances dragged into diſſipation and expence, are, nevertheleſs, ſubject to the inconvenience of a fixed ſtipend; which would be a much leſs hardſhip on the clergy, whoſe Chriſtian virtues, aſſiſted by ſtudy, and cul-

cultivated in retirement, muſt have fewer demands on the vanities and ſuperfluities of life.

The beſt argument that can be offered *in theſe times* by the clergy, is, that "a bill for this purpoſe is directly againſt Magna Charta, of which the firſt clauſe is for confirming the inviolable rights of Holy Church." The rights of Holy Church (which means the church in King John's time) were *the rights of Popery*; and yet a Proteſtant divine, of diſtinguiſhed abilities, ventured to introduce this ſhallow plea in defence of a Proteſtant clergy. As to the oath taken by our Kings at their coronation, to protect the church in all her juſt rights, it is as Hamlet ſays, "more honoured in the breach than in the obſervance," *whenever the public good requires it*; for can any thing be more abſurd, than to hear a King of England ſwear fealty to the church, as if ſhe had intereſts ſeparate from the good of that nation which ſets him upon the throne, or poſſeſſed a power of preventing it. But the abſurdity has ever been evinced, and the oath diſregarded, in all caſes where a modus is eſtabliſhed by law, or newly incloſed land alloted to clergymen in lieu of tythes. It is true, the conſtitution ought not to be violated, but the clergy are not (which the Dean would inſinuate) a part of the conſtitution. The church is a part of the conſtitution; but the clergy (as Voltaire obſerves) are no more the church, than the magiſtrates are the ſtate; and I apprehend, that neither church nor ſtate would be injured by any reform that might be made in the miniſtry of either.

*Swift*

*Swift*, who was as converſant in the policy of courts, as he was eminent in the literary world, avails himſelf of " the obvious effect the repeal of " tythes would have on the value of the King's " patronage, in the diſpoſal of the various pre- " ferments of the church." Had he played with the idea as a ſatiriſt, and expoſed the corrupt purpoſes to which even ſacred things are applied he would have adhered to his own line of character, without departing from that of a clergyman. But as he evidently employed it as an incentive to a court party, to oppoſe the ſucceſs of a beneficial meaſure, I ſhall leave him in full poſſeſſion of the argument, and all the credit he can derive from it.

Some of the clergy moſt ridiculouſly inſiſt, that by the abolition of tythes the landlords would raiſe their rents, and the farmer would only exchange one tyrant for another. *Swift* makes uſe of the ſame plea; yet it is very certain, that the farmer *is* only a *voluntary tenant*, and is at liberty to reject unreaſonable demands; but as ſoon as a farm is taken, taken too with the proſpect of the ſame eaſy compoſition for tythes as was uſually paid, he is liable to have them exacted in kind, from which no remonſtances can ſecure him; ſo that the difference is evident, an unreaſonable landlord will find his farms untenanted; a tyrannical rector muſt be obeyed.

But it is impoſſible to paint ſuch rectors in more odious colours than the Dean himſelf as done, where he inſinuates the great ſervice the clergy might be of to agriculture, in proportion as the go-

government allowed them to be intereſted in it. On the other hand, ſays he, " there are rectors " who threaten to uſe their endeavours to obſtruct " all improvement," unleſs the good effects of it flow in full tides into their own pockets. Such men (if there be ſuch in theſe days) inſtead of being reſpected as inſtruments of the temporal or eternal happineſs of mankind, ſhould be treated as traitors to that country which ſupports and protects them.

There cannot be any thing more nauſeous to the moſt common underſtanding, than when clergymen ſpeak of the land, in which they are intereſted as tythe gatherers; to hear them call it *their arable land*; eſpecially if the term is uſed as a plea of right in oppoſition to improvement: and yet the Dean uſes it in that ſenſe with ſo much confidence that the cooleſt tempers would be ruffled at it, if their anger did not ſubſide into contempt. Yet ſo tenacious is he, like the reſt of his cloth, of this ſhadow of property, that he concludes by obſerving, that tythes have ever been reſpected by the legiſlature " becauſe *inheritances* deſerve greater " regard than *employments*." Now I look upon a place for life to be as good an inheritance as a rectory, for the one is ſucceeded to by a layman to the excluſion of the clergy, and the other by a clergyman to the excluſion of a layman; and it is certain that the offices of Earl Marſhal and Champion of England are much more like inheritances than either of the other, and yet if theſe honoured relicks of antient chivalry *were as numerous and troubleſome* as thoſe of Popery, they might

all

all be extinguiſhed together, by the ſlighteſt alteration in *ceremonials*.

Theſe are the principal reaſons which the Dean employed in oppoſition to the anti-tythe bill; but I cannot think ſo meanly of the abilities of any Parliament, to conclude that they could be of any weight. The corrupt intereſts of a Court, or the private ones of individuals, did, in all likelihood, rather incline thoſe men to keep up the value of their patronages, than to concur with him in any other particular. The extenſive influence of courts we know can do much, but ſuch landlords as are not biaſſed by it, ſhould conſider how gladly the farmer would pay them an advanced rent, if, by their aſſiſtance, he could be relieved from the oppreſſion of the tythe laws; and how much ſuch a meaſure would increaſe the value of their eſtates, by introducing a more vigorous cultivation. To theſe reaſons of a private nature, let them add every public conſideration; and the paltry apprehenſion of reducing the value of the patronage, will be of little force with men who are not deficient either in probity or underſtanding.

# LETTER X.

*To the Societies eſtabliſhed throughout England for the Encouragement of Agriculture.*

*Gentlemen,*

THE noble principles and patriotic views which have united you in the ſupport of agriculture, will naturally extend themſelves to the adopting every meaſure that is conducive to it. With this aſſurance the huſbandman, while he receives with gratitude all the advantages of your voluntary aſſiſtance, is encouraged to apply to you in his diſtreſs.

It is unneceſſary to enumerate thoſe grievances ariſing from the tythe laws, that particularly oppreſs the farmer; it is ſufficient, that, as they are a univerſal diſcouragement to agriculture, they muſt of courſe be detrimental both to individuals and the public. Even if they were only injurious to individuals, the very idea of partial oppreſſion will, at all times, rouſe the generous feelings of Engliſhmen; but when the public good is likewiſe concerned, thoſe who ſtand forth as volunteers in patriotic aſſociations, are doubly bound to exert themſelves againſt them.

Though you have not the immediate power of redreſs, yet as your ſocieties are compoſed of gentlemen, reſpectable in their ſeveral counties, they,

by

by publicly patronizing all legal attempts to obtain it, may more effectually improve the riſing ſpirit of the landholders, who hitherto, awed by cuſtom, and intimidated by the difficulty of ſucceeding againſt a numerous and powerful clergy, have too long ſubmitted to a tyrannical impoſture, as pernicious and abſurd as ever prieſtcraft invented.

It is in vain for all the efforts of generoſity and genius combined, to point out to the farmer, different modes of improvement, if there remains one principal obſtruction to his putting them in execution. There is a courſe of huſbandry which, by being properly ſuited to different ſoils, will turn out moſt beneficial to the farmer and to the public. The foundation of good huſbandry is cattle; for where a well proportioned number of cattle is kept, the more manure is raiſed to improve and increaſe the quantity of corn. Rural œconomy, founded on theſe principles, may be compared to a well-turned arch, which depends only on itſelf, becauſe the whole is ſupported by the juſt harmony of all its parts. But it is the intereſt of the tythe-gatherer to deſtroy this harmony by diſcouraging the growth of fodder. He prefers a corn-farm to every other, becauſe he knows that the moſt lucrative part of his tythes is ſacrificed to thoſe crops neceſſary to the raiſing manure. If the farmer muſt have manure, he may buy it; the tythe-gatherer gets ten pounds in every hundred that is laid out, and the future advantages of the expence beſides. If, on the contrary, the manure is obtained by raiſing food for cattle, the farmer

ſaves his money, while his cattle increaſe his profit; and the public is benefited by the due proportion of different ſorts of proviſion. This method is likewiſe oppoſed by a compounding rector, who takes a different compoſition for different crops; for he, finding his gains diminiſhed by this new improvement of proportioning one part of a farm to another, ſtarts forth as a tythe-gatherer, and threatens the farmer with all the plagues of collecting his tythe-in-kind, unleſs his new ſcheme of improvement is laid aſide. The conſequence of this *has been*, that landholders, to avoid this iron ſcourge, have converted their whole farms to paſture; ſo that in countries where the roads have been impaſſible in the winter, bread corn has been at a very high price, becauſe a quantity has not been raiſed ſufficient to ſupply the inhabitants.

There can be no occaſion to prove the truth of this aſſertion, by naming the very places where theſe grievances have been experienced both by the individual and the public. Our own reaſon will tell us, that, in the natural train of cauſes and effects, theſe conſequences muſt follow wherever the ſelfiſh rapacity of a tythe-gather exerts the power of tyrannizing. In ſuch men, we meet with the character drawn by *Swift*, verified in our days, who, unleſs they find their own account in improvement, will be as inſtrumental as poſſible in obſtructing it, though at the expence of their pariſhioners who ſupport them.

Since then the grand, the capital improvement in agriculture, is undoubtedly to aſcertain and practiſe

practiſe that courſe of huſbandry which anſwers the great end of *univerſal plenty*, whatever is an obſtruction to that end becomes the principal object of your conſideration. The cuſtom of taking tythes-in-kind is, and ever will be, that *obſtruction*; and unleſs you uſe all your influence to aboliſh it, inferior attentions will be as ill beſtowed as the ingenuity of an artiſt, who ſhould exert the greateſt ſkill on the minuter parts of a piece of mechaniſm, yet neglect the main ſpring which muſt give life and ſpirit to the whole.

You, Gentlemen, are aſſociated to reſcue agriculture from the ſhackles of vulgar prejudices; and from an indolent acquieſcence in the errors of cuſtom, the attempt is truly patriotic; for they are the bane of all improvement, becauſe an implicit deference to their authority debaſes the underſtanding till it becomes inſenſible of its own powers. From the imaginary impoſſibility of ſurmounting them, is derived the reluctancy which is ſhewn even by men of abilities towards promoting the good of ſociety. It is this depreſſes the ſpirits of the ſufferer, till he grows habituated to the yoke. It is this encourages the oppreſſor to triumph over the oppreſſed, and to flatter himſelf that injuſtice has changed its nature. Hence too we ſee eccleſiaſtical impoſtors emboldened to maintain a divine right of tythes, and to ranſack, in ſupport of it, every exploded legend, which in other caſes they would deride as the moſt contemptible ravings of ſuperſtition and ignorance. Theſe are the men who, whenever this nation ſhall imitate other reformed countries,

and

and ſeriouſly ſet about annulling the tythe-laws, will blaſphemouſly exclaim, that Heaven itſelf is inſulted through them; and that endeavouring to deprive them of their tythe, is encroaching on the property of the Creator. Or they will try to diſcourage timid ſpirits, by falſly inſinuating, that ſuch a meaſure would ſhake the foundations of private property, and introduce ruin and confuſion throughout the land. But theſe are not the days of unbounded devotion to the opinions and intereſts of churchmen; the reſpect they meet with now is paid only where it is deſerved; the dominion of bigotry is paſt;

*They don't now thunder* their anathemas
*With all the rage of* Rome *to ſecond them.*

Their divine right of tythes is diſclaimed by authority of parliament; and happy would it be for them, if even their legal right was ſo well founded on the pillars of truth and juſtice as to require no unchriſtian efforts to ſupport it. With ſuch real diſadvantages they can never expect to prevail over the united attacks of a free, enlightened people: they may flatter themſelves on their numbers and connections; but unleſs a corrupt adminiſtration ſhould think it neceſſary to court their intereſt, their utmoſt endeavours to diſturb the peace and happineſs of this great kingdom, would be of as little conſequence as "the dew drop on the lion's mane."

Then let it not be ſaid, Gentlemen, that aſſociations entered into for the encouragement of agriculture attended only to the minutiæ of improvement;

provement; that when they undertook to combat eſtabliſhed errors, and vulgar prejudices, they declined engaging with the only adverſary that was worthy of their ſtrength. But let the juſtice of the cauſe, the conſideration of both public and private benefit, animate you to complete the generous character you have aſſumed, by patronizing *every legal and conſtitutional attempt* to aboliſh the payment of tythes in kind.

---

## LETTER* XI.

IT may certainly be reckoned among the vulgar errors, to ſuppoſe that the abolition of tythes would be a ſevere ſtroke upon the clergy; on the contrary, if properly managed, they would derive great benefit from it. Some individuals indeed, who are poſſeſſed of very luacrative benefices, and who improve them to the utmoſt by taking tythes-in-kind, would be deprived of a few ſuperfluous luxuries, which they now indulge in at the expence of decency, charity, and juſtice. The tythe-gatherer himſelf acknowledges, that a proper ſubſtitute in lieu of tythes, is a moſt deſirable thing; but then his wiſhes are turned upon ſome meaſure which would eaſe him of his trouble without diminiſhing his income.

---

* This letter appeared under a different ſignature, but evidently belongs to the reſt.

come. He is not ſo attached to the divine inſtitution of Moſes, but on the leaſt mention of an equivalent in land "his face will ſhine" like that great law-giver's when he deſcended from the mount; and he will readily give up his favourite argument, of the inviolable divinity of tythes, for the more ſolid ſecurity of worldly poſſeſſions.

This eccleſiaſtical claim confers no advantages whatever, upon the clergy, as members of the community. It does not cloath them with reſpect, or yield them any future proſpect of dominion, but expoſes them to the odium and contempt of the kingdom, on account of a revenne which has no *neceſſary* connection with the prieſthood; and though it has obtained laws and opinions in its favour, they are as ſuperſtitious and abſurd as thoſe relating to witchcraft. It diſtreſſes the man of liberal principles, by *obliging him* to ſtoop to actions ſo much below the dignity of his character; for it is not every clergyman whoſe circumſtances will enable him to compound at great diſadvantages, rather than ſubmit to the brutality of a roguiſh pariſhioner. How many rectors are there in obſcure corners of the kingdom, with incomes ſo ſmall, that they are forced to extort a deſpicable pittance from objects, if poſſible, more indigent than themſelves? Amid the gloom of ſuch a ſituation, the beſt of men has ſcarcely an opportunity to catch a ray of chearfulneſs from the recollection of one beneficent act, and thus loſes the power of conciliating thoſe minds he has offended by a ſevere, though unavoidable oppreſſion.

Theſe are the certain effects of tythes in thoſe pariſhes which do not afford a competent proviſion for the rector. Poverty in the clergy in theſe days is not a matter of choice, and is ſure to leſſen them in the eſtimation of the *vulgar*, becauſe the ſuperiority of their character, and the inferiority of their fortunes, are apt to create compariſons; and the great riches of ſome of the prieſthood, ſeems to reflect a want of merit in the poorer ſort: otherwiſe poverty was formerly their pride; and while it was the voluntary garb of the profeſſion, attracted ſuch reverence, as at length converted their coarſe rayment into *purple and fine linen*. While tythes too were voluntary, they were an ample ſupport for all their neceſſities; but now they are eſtabliſhed as a law, they ſerve only to pamper the luxury of one part of the clergy, but have reduced the other to their primitive indigence, and at the ſame time deprived them of its former conſolation, the reſpect and contributions of the public.

What hinders then, now that the Proteſtant religion is eſtabliſhed, and a heirarchy appointed for the political views of church diſcipline, that the clergy ſhould not be ſubjected to the ſame regulations in their revenues that are ſubmitted to by all other appendants to government. If the clergy have friends enough, either from reaſons of ſtate, or merit in their ſervices, to obtain a ſtipendiary eſtabliſhment equivalent to the value of tythes, in God's name let them have it; yet, as it is an indiſputable fact, that their property in tythes is not an *original independent right*, it

ought not to operate as a rule to determine the amount of an eccleſiaſtical eſtabliſhment. But if the clergy muſt be gratified with a full equivalent, ſtill it is neceſſary and juſt that the burthen of it be borne by the community in general, and not by the landholders in particular. A revenue raiſed upon principles ſo equitable and univerſal, when collected into one maſs, might be as equitably and univerſally diſtributed; and men, whoſe natural and acquired abilities entitle them to rank with thoſe of the higheſt dignity in the church, would, at their entrance into it, be ſure to obtain a competency at leaſt, and might, with ſuitable regulations, ſtand as fair a chance of promotion as in any other department of the State.

A reformation which will be attended with ſo many private and national benefits, can be eaſily effected by the ſingle *fiat* of government; and when the nature and amount of the tax are fixed upon, the clergy in convocation might diſpoſe of it, by *claſſing* every member of the church in proportion to the value of their benefices. Juſtice and good policy will point out the neceſſity of raiſing the pooreſt livings to a reſpectable competency, and the ſalaries of the better ſort will determine themſelves by the amount of the tax allotted, and the attention which ſhould be paid to preſent incomes; ſo that each benefice will be aſſigned to its proper claſs, and the dignitaries of the church maintain a proportionable degree of ſuperiority.

Such

Such a change in clerical revenues need create no alteration in church lands, much leſs interfere with the rights of patronage, which being the privilege of the landed intereſt, can never be given up. The value of preſentations would in moſt inſtances be changed, as ſome would be made better, others worſe. Preſent incumbents, whoſe ſalaries would not amount to the value of tythes-in-kind, ought to ſubmit to the abolition of a Popiſh impoſture with that decency that becomes Proteſtant divines; and conſidering their preſent tythes not as their *property*, but as their *wages*, ſhould comfort themſelves under a trifling reduction, that their lot, *without ſuperior rights*, is ſtill better than a diſcarded placeman.

The advocates for a pound rate prefer that mode of taxation, becauſe it obviates the objections which the clergy make to a fixed ſalary, on account of the decreaſe in the value of money. But till it can be proved that a clergyman cannot live at his parſonage on any given ſum, as eaſily as a placeman on the ſame ſum, liable to the ſame objection, the plea does not deſerve attention. But a pound rate is exceptionable, becauſe it muſt either be collected like the land-tax, in which caſe the whole burthen of it will reſt upon the landlord, or by a pariſh rate, which will ſolely affect the tenant, beſides being ſubject to the abuſes which at preſent diſgrace thoſe levies. In either method there will be an evident partiality, which, in a cauſe of ſuch general concern, ought not to be admitted.

It has before been remarked, that the window tax, on its preſent footing, ſeems ſo well calculated for equity and univerſality, as to deſerve being a pattern for every other tax of the ſame intention. How far ſuch a plan is applicable to the revenues of the church, I will not preſume to ſay; but there can be no reduplication of it whatever, which can be more oppreſſive to the farmer, and injurious to the public, than the cuſtom of tythes. The idea may appear ludicrous; but a law to oblige a ſubſtantial farmer to keep a domeſtic chaplain, would, in many inſtances, be more eligible, and leſs ſevere.

It is contrary to the ſpirit of equity, that every pariſh ſhould maintain its own prieſt, becauſe ſuch a regulation bears very lightly upon ſome pariſhes, and very hard upon others. Such an abſurdity is too groſs to be derived from a legiſlative act, which muſt conſider the clergy as objects of national ſupport: on the contrary, it took its riſe from private donations, reſtricted by papal authority to the limits of their own pariſhes, and afterwards indolently acquieſced in and confirmed by parliament. Since, therefore, a parochial tax can never be adopted by the legiſlative power, becauſe contrary to juſtice, a general tax muſt be ſubſtituted in its room; which will of neceſſity produce a fixed ſalary. Nothing then remains but the mode of diſtribution, which is perfectly immaterial to the public, provided a reſpectable competence is allotted to every clergyman, and the official duties of religion are univerſally extended throughout the kingdom.

When

When the difficulties of fixing upon a ſubſtitute in lieu of tythes are once ſurmounted, no attention would be requiſite, no diſputes ariſe, in the diſpoſal of this pretended property, ſince it would ſo naturally devolve to the farmer, by whoſe induſtry it was raiſed. Eccleſiaſtical polity would then run ſmoothly on in a road of its own; no encroachments would be made on the eſtates of the laity; the fences of juſtice would not be broken down, nor the courts of law be perpetually appealed to in differences ſo diſcouraging to agriculture, and prejudicial to religion. Every future rector would go down to his benefice, in that complacency of temper natural upon ſuch occaſions; no little ſordid views would intrude themſelves, and raiſe in him the ſpirit of jealouſy, avarice, and uncharitableneſs; he would be under no embarraſſment, between gratitude to his patron, attention to the intereſts of his ſucceſſors, and the liberality of his own diſpoſition; he would not be tempted to commence hoſtilities, by taking the tythe-in-kind, or to uſe his power as the means of extortion, but would find himſelf in that moſt agreeable of all ſituations, able to command the eſteem and reſpect of his pariſhioners, who would receive him not as a new oppreſſor, but as a *Samaritan* neighbour; the long conteſted tythe-pig would no more be ſacrificed to bigotry and litigation, but occaſionally be preſented as a free will offering of affection; if he cultivated his glebe, his whole pariſh would be ready to aſſiſt him; his doctrines would not loſe their effect, becauſe proceeding from the mouth of an

ex

extortioner; but religion would assume her natural benignity; and confidence, harmony, and peace, again be established between the pastor and his flock.

---

## CONCLUSION.

TO render the subject of the foregoing letters more easy to be comprehended by those for whose use they were writen, I shall take a short review of the whole.

It has been shewn, that the tythe laws have no claim to our respect as christians, since they were not recommended by the Apostles; neither are they to be respected equally with our other laws, for government had no hand in framing them; but they were invented by popish priests, and then meanly suffered to be established as the laws of the land; that the protestant clergy do not hold their tythes as *property*, but as *wages*, for performing the duties of the church; so that it is plain, that the law can make what alteration it pleases, in the wages of those who are the servants of government. It has been shewn, that to pay the clergy their wages, a very severe and heavy tax is laid upon the farmer, called a tythe, and that he is the only subject in the kingdom that pays this tax, which is contrary to common sense and common honesty; that

that the tythe-gatherer is ſuffered to tyrannize over him by law; that he pays rent for the ground of which the tythe-gatherer has the benefit; that he works for him as his maſter, and buys manure and ſeed to raiſe him crops out of his own pocket; that that there is no appearance of any allowance from his landlord for all theſe hardſhips, but *there is no doubt that he ſuffers them all*, ſo that it is his buſineſs to relieve himſelf if he can. That as the tythe laws are ſo oppreſſive and unjuſt, and invented only by popiſh prieſts, he has reaſon to expect relief from the juſtice of parliament; and the more ſo, becauſe they are a great hindrance to huſbandry, and of courſe hurtful to the public. That chriſtianity itſelf is injured by them, becauſe they create diſputes between the parſon and his pariſhioners: that tho' the clergy are juſtly held in great reverence, yet their profeſſion does not ſet them above the laws; but as they do not hold their tythes without the authority of government, if the farmer finds them oppreſſive and unjuſt, government can deliver him from their oppreſſion. And it has been ſhewn, that the farmer has every encouragement to ſeek redreſs, ſince the legiſlature has given plain proofs of its diſapprobation of tythes, by allotting to the clergy a quantity of land inſtead of them, wherever any waſtes have been newly encloſed: and moreover, that every claſs of men but the farmer, has been relieved already: ſo that if he is the only ſubject in the kingdom, who neglects his own intereſt, through indolence, he does not deſerve pity, but may be compared to the waggoner in the fable; who, when his waggon

ſtuck

ſtuck in the mire, complained bitterly of his diſtreſs, and prayed to the God Hercules to aſſiſt him; but he was told he only loſt his time, for if he had ſenſe and ſpirit enough to clap his ſhoulder to the wheel, he would find that he was able to relieve himſelf.

FINIS.

109. d 3.